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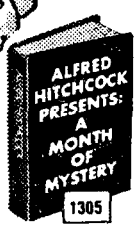

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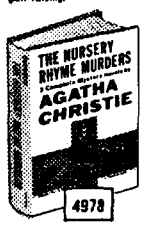

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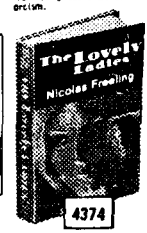

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Herewith Number Three in the series of curious cases that have confronted the members of the Black Widowers Club (and at the time of this writing, Number Four is already in first draft) . . . At this session the guest, brought by artist Mario Gonzalo, gives the club a problem in pure logic. Mr. John Sand seemed to be the only possible culprit; yet he denied guilt, and as everyone knew (and the reader can take this as gospel), Mr. Sand always told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth . . .

THE MAN WHO NEVER TOLD A LIE

by ISAAC ASIMOV

When Roger Halsted made his appearance at the head of the stairs on the day of the monthly meeting of the Black Widowers, the only others yet present were Avalon, the patent-attorney, and Rubin, the writer. They greeted him with jubilation.

Emmanuel Rubin said, "Well, you've finally managed to stir yourself up to the point of meeting your old friends, have you?" He trotted over and held out both his hands, his straggly beard stretching to match his grin. "Where've you been the last two meetings?"

"Hello, Roger," said Geoffrey Avalon, smiling from his stiff height.

Halsted shucked his coat. "Damned cold outside. Henry, bring—"

Henry, the only waiter the Black Widowers ever had or ever would have, already had the drink waiting. "I'm glad to see you again, sir."

Halsted took it with a nod of thanks. "Twice running something came up— Say, you know what I've decided to do?"

"Give up mathematics and make an honest living?" asked Rubin.

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Halsted sighed. "Teaching math at a junior high school is as honest a living as one can find. That's why it pays so little."

"In that case," said Avalon, swirling his drink gently, "why is free-lance writing so dishonest a racket?"

"Free-lance writing is *not* dishonest," said free-lance Rubin, rising to the bait at once.

"What have you decided to do, Roger?" asked Avalon.

"It's this project I've dreamed up," said Halsted. His forehead rose white and high, showing no signs of the hairline that had been there perhaps ten years ago, though the hair was still copious enough around the sides and in the back. "I'm going to rewrite the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in limericks, one for each of the forty-eight books they contain."

Avalon nodded. "Any of it written?"

"I've got the first book of the *Iliad* taken care of. It goes like this:

"Agamemnon, the top-ranking Greek,
To Achilles in anger did speak.
They argued a lot,
Then Achilles grew hot,
And went stamping away in a pique."

"Not bad," said Avalon. "In fact, quite good. It gets across the essence of the first book in full. Of course, the proper name of the hero of the *Iliad* is Achilleus, with the 'ch' sound as in—"

"That would throw off the meter," said Halsted.

"Besides," said Rubin, "everyone would think the 'u' was a typographical error and that's all they'd see in the limerick."

Mario Gonzalo, the artist, came racing up the stairs. He was host for this session and he said, "Anyone else here?"

"Nobody here but us old folks," said Avalon.

"My guest is on his way up. Real interesting guy. Henry will like him because he never tells a lie."

Henry lifted an eyebrow as he produced Mario's drink.

"Don't tell me you're bringing the ghost of George Washington!" said Halsted.

"Roger! A pleasure to see you again. —By the way, Jim Drake won't be here with us today. He sent back the card saying there was some family shindig he had to attend. The guest I'm bringing is a fellow named Sand—John Sand. I've known him on and off for years. Real crazy guy. Horse-race buff who never tells a lie. I've heard him *not* telling lies. It's about the only virtue he has." And Gonzalo winked.

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Avalon nodded. "Good for those who can. As one grows older, however—"

"And I think it will be an interesting session," added Gonzalo hurriedly, visibly avoiding one of Avalon's long-winded confidences. "I was telling him about the Black Widowers Club and how the last two times we had mysteries on our hands—"

"Mysteries?" said Halsted, with sudden interest.

Gonzalo said, "You're a member of the club in good standing, so we can tell you. But get Henry to do it. He was a principal both times."

"Henry?" Halsted looked over his shoulder in mild surprise. "Are they getting you involved in their idiocies?"

"I assure you, Mr. Halsted, I tried not to be," said Henry.

"Tried not to be!" exclaimed Rubin. "Listen, Henry was the Sherlock of the session last time. He—"

"The point is," said Avalon, "that you may have talked too much, Mario. What did you tell your friend about us?"

"What do you mean, talked too much? I'm not Mannie Rubin, you know. I carefully told Sand that we were priests at the confessional, one and all, as far as anything in this room is concerned, and he said he wished he were a member because he has a difficulty that's been driving him wild, and I said he could come the next time because it was my turn to be host and he could be my guest and—here he is!"

A slim man, his neck swathed in a thick scarf, was mounting the stairs. The slimness was emphasized when he took off his coat. Under the scarf his tie gleamed blood-red and seemed to lend color to a thin and pallid face. He was thirtyish.

"John Sand," said Mario, introducing him all round in a pageant that was interrupted by Thomas Trumbull's heavy tread on the steps and the code expert's loud cry of "Henry, a Scotch and soda for a dying man!"

Rubin said, "Tom, you could be here early if only you'd relax and stop trying so hard to be late."

"The later I come," said Trumbull, "the less I have to hear of your stupid remarks. Ever think of that?" Then he was introduced too, and they all sat down.

Since the menu for that meeting had been so incautiously planned as to begin with artichokes, Rubin launched into a dissertation on the preparation of the only proper sauce. Then, when Trumbull said disgustedly that the only proper preparation for artichokes in-

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volved a large garbage can, Rubin said, "Sure, *if* you don't have exactly the right sauce."

Sand ate uneasily and left at least one-third of his excellent steak untouched. Halsted, who had a tendency to plumpness, eyed the remains enviously. His own plate was the first one to be cleaned. Only a scraped bone and some fat were left.

Sand seemed to grow aware of Halsted's eyes and said, "Frankly, I'm too worried to have much appetite. Would you care for the rest of my steak?"

"Me? No, thank you," said Halsted glumly.

Sand smiled. "May I be frank?"

"Of course. If you've been listening to the conversation around the table, you'll realize frankness is the order of the day."

"Good, because I would be anyway. It's my—fetish. You're lying, Mr. Halsted. Of course you want the rest of my steak, and you'd eat it, too, if you thought no one would notice. That's perfectly obvious, but social convention requires you to lie. You don't want to seem greedy and you don't want to seem to ignore the elements of hygiene by eating something possibly contaminated by the saliva of a stranger."

Halsted frowned. "And what if the situation were reversed?"

"And I was hungry for more steak?"

"Yes."

"Well, I might not want to eat yours for hygienic reasons, but I would admit I wanted it. Almost all lying is the result of a desire for self-protection or out of respect for social conventions. To me, however, a lie is rarely a useful defense and I am not at all interested in social conventions."

Rubin said, "Actually, a lie *is* a useful defense if it is a thoroughgoing one. The trouble with most lies is that they don't go far enough."

"Been reading *Mein Kampf* lately?" said Gonzalo.

Rubin's eyebrows went up. "You think *Hitler* was the first to use the technique of the big lie? You can go back to Napoleon III; you can go back to Julius Caesar. Have you ever read his *Commentaries?*"

Henry was bringing the baba au rhum and pouring the coffee delicately when Avalon said, "Let's get to our honored guest."

Gonzalo said, "As host and chairman of this session I'm going to cancel the grilling. Our guest has a problem and I direct him to favor us with its details." He was drawing a quick caricature of Sand on the back of the menu card, with a thin sad face accentuated into

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the face of a distorted bloodhound.

Sand cleared his throat. "I understand everything said in this room is in the strictest confidence. But—"

Trumbull followed Sand's glance, then growled, "Don't worry about Henry. He is the best of us all. If you want to doubt someone's discretion, doubt someone else."

"Thank you, sir," murmured Henry, setting up the brandy glasses on the sideboard.

Sand said, "The trouble, gentlemen, is that I am suspected of a crime."

"What kind of crime?" demanded Trumbull. It was his duty, ordinarily, to grill the guests and the look in his eye was that of a person who had no intention of missing his opportunity.

"Theft," said Sand. "There is a sum of money and a wad of negotiable bonds missing from a safe in my company. I'm one of those who know the combination, and I've had a chance to open the safe unobserved. I also have a motive—I've had bad luck at the races and needed cash urgently. So it doesn't look good for me."

Gonzalo said eagerly, "But he didn't do it. That's the point. He didn't do it."

Avalon twirled the half drink he was not going to finish and said, "I think in the interest of coherence we ought to allow Mr. Sand to tell his story."

"Yes," said Trumbull, "how do *you* know he didn't do it, Mario?"

"That's the whole point, damn it. He *says* he didn't do it," replied Gonzalo, "and if he says so, that's good enough for me. Maybe not for a court, but it's good enough for anyone who knows him. I've heard him admit enough rotten things that other people wouldn't—"

"Suppose I ask him myself, okay?" said Trumbull. "*Did* you take the stuff, Mr. Sand?"

Sand paused. His blue eyes flicked from face to face, then he said, "Gentlemen, I am telling the absolute truth. I did not take the cash or the bonds."

Halsted passed his hand upward over his forehead, as though trying to clear away doubts.

"Mr. Sand," he said, "you seem to have a position of some trust. You can get into a safe with negotiable assets in it. Yet you play the horses."

"Lots of people do."

"And lose."

"I didn't quite plan it that way."

"But don't you risk losing your job?"

"My advantage, sir, is that I am employed by my uncle, who

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is aware of my weakness, but who also knows I don't lie. He knew I had the means and the opportunity to steal, and he knew I had debts. He also knew I had recently paid off my gambling debts. I told him so. Yet the circumstantial evidence against me looked bad. But then he asked me directly if I was responsible for the loss and I told him exactly what I told you: I did not take the cash or the bonds. Since he knows me well, he believes me."

"How were you able to pay off your gambling debts?" said Avalon.

"Because a long shot came through. That happens, too, sometimes. It happened shortly before the theft was discovered and I paid off the bookies."

"But then you didn't have a motive," said Gonzalo.

"I can't say that. The theft might have been committed as long as two weeks before its discovery. No one looked in that particular drawer in the safe for that period of time—except the thief, of course. It could be argued that after I took the cash and bonds, the horse came through and made the theft unnecessary—too late."

"It might also be argued," said Halsted, "that you took the money in order to place a large bet on the horse."

"The bet wasn't that large, and I had other sources. But, yes, it could also be argued that way."

Trumbull broke in, "But if you still have your job, as I suppose you do, and if your uncle isn't prosecuting you, as I assume he isn't— Has he notified the police at all?"

"No, he can absorb the loss and he feels the police will only try to pin it on me. He knows that what I have told him is true."

"Then what's the problem, for God's sake?"

"There's simply no one else who could have done it. My uncle can't think of any other way of accounting for the theft. Nor, for that matter, can I. And as long as he can't see any alternative, there will always be a residuum of uneasiness, of suspicion, in his mind. He will always keep his eye on me. He will always be reluctant to trust me. I'll keep my job, but I'll never be promoted; and I may be made uncomfortable enough to be forced to resign. If I do, I can't count on a wholehearted recommendation, and from an uncle, a half-hearted one would be ruinous."

Rubin was frowning. "So you came here, Mr. Sand, because Gonzalo said we solve mysteries. You want us to tell you who really took the stuff."

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Sand shrugged. "Maybe not. I don't even know if I can give you enough information. It's not as though you're detectives who can go to the scene of the crime and make inquiries. If you could just tell me how it *might* have been done—even if it's far-fetched, that would help. If I could go to my uncle and say, 'Uncle, it might have been done this way, mightn't it?' Even if he couldn't be sure, even if he couldn't ever get the money and bonds back, it would at least spread the suspicion. He wouldn't have the eternal nagging thought that I was the *only possible* thief."

"Well," said Avalon, "we can try to be logical, I suppose. How about the other people who work with you and your uncle? Would any of them need money badly?"

Sand shook his head. "Enough to risk the possible consequences of being caught? I don't know. One of them might be in debt, or one might be paying blackmail, or one might be greedy, or just had the opportunity and acted on impulse. If I were a detective I could go about asking questions, or I could track down documents, or whatever it is they do. As it is—"

"Of course," said Avalon, "we can't do that either. —Now you say you had both means and opportunity. Did anyone else have them?"

"At least three people could have got into the safe more easily than I and got away with it more easily, but not one of them knew the combination, and the safe wasn't broken into; that's certain. There are two people besides my uncle and myself who know the combination, but one has been hospitalized over the entire period in question and the other is such an old and reliable member of the firm that to suspect him seems unthinkable."

"Aha," said Mario Gonzalo, "there's our man right there."

"You've been reading too many Agatha Christies," said Rubin. "The fact of the matter is that in almost every crime on record, the most suspicious person turns out to be the criminal."

"That's beside the point," said Halsted, "and too dull besides. What we have here is a pure exercise in logic. Let's have Mr. Sand tell us everything he knows about every member of the firm, and we can all try to see if there's any way in which we can work out motive, means, and opportunity for some other person."

"Oh, hell," said Trumbull, "who says it has to be *one* person? So someone's in a

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hospital. Big deal. The telephone exists. He phones the combination to a confederate."

"All right, all right," said Halsted hastily, "we're bound to think up all sorts of possibilities and some may be more plausible than others. After we've thrashed them out, Mr. Sand can choose the most plausible and tell it to his uncle."

"May I speak, sir?" Henry spoke so quickly, and at a sound level so much higher than his usual murmur, that everyone turned to face him.

Henry said, this time softly, "Although I'm not a Black Widower—"

"Not so," said Rubin. "You *know* you're a Black Widower. In fact, you're the only one who's never missed a single meeting."

"Then may I point out, gentlemen, that if Mr. Sand carries your conclusion, whatever it may be, to his uncle, he will be carrying the proceedings of this meeting beyond the walls of this room."

There was an uncomfortable silence. Halsted said, "In the interest of saving an innocent person's reputation, surely—"

Henry shook his head gently. "But it would be at the cost of spreading suspicion to one or more other people, who might also be innocent."

Avalon said, "Henry's got something there. We seem to be stymied."

"Unless," said Henry, "we can come to a definite conclusion that will satisfy the club and will not involve the outside world."

"What do you have in mind, Henry?" asked Trumbull.

"If I may explain— I was, as Mr. Gonzalo said before dinner, interested to meet someone who never tells a lie."

"Now come, Henry," said Rubin, "you're pathologically honest yourself. You know you are. That's been established more than once."

"That may be so," said Henry, "but I *do* tell lies."

"Do you doubt Sand? Do you think he's lying?" said Rubin.

"I assure you—" began Sand, almost in anguish.

"No," said Henry, "I believe that every word Mr. Sand has said is true. He didn't take the money or the bonds. He is the logical one at whom suspicion points. His career may be ruined. His career, on the other hand, may not be ruined if some reasonable alternative explanation can be found, even if that does not actually lead to a solution. And, since he can think of no reasonable alternative himself, he wants us to help find one for him. I am

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convinced, gentlemen, that all this is true."

Sand nodded. "Well, thank you."

"And yet," said Henry, "what is truth? For instance, Mr. Trumbull, I think that your habit of perpetually arriving late with a cry of 'Scotch and soda for a dying man' is rude, unnecessary, and, worse yet, has grown boring. I suspect others here feel the same."

Trumbull flushed, but Henry went on firmly, "Yet if, under ordinary circumstances, I were asked whether I disapproved of it, I would say I did not. Strictly speaking, that would be a lie, but I like you for other reasons, Mr. Trumbull, that far outweigh this verbal trick of yours; so telling the strict truth, which would imply a dislike for you, would end up being a greater lie. Therefore I lie to express a truth—my liking for you."

Trumbull muttered, "I'm not sure I like your way of liking, Henry."

Henry said, "Or consider Mr. Halsted's limerick on the first book of the *Iliad*. Mr. Avalon quite rightly said that Achilleus is the correct name of the hero, or even Akhilleus with a 'k,' I suppose, to suggest the correct sound. But then Mr. Rubin pointed out that the truth would seem like a typographical error and spoil the effect of the limerick. Again, literal truth creates a problem.

"Mr. Sand said that all lies arise out of a desire for self-protection or out of respect for social conventions. But we cannot always ignore self-protection and social conventions. If we cannot lie, we must make the truth lie for us."

Gonzalo said, "You're not making sense, Henry."

"I think I am, Mr. Gonzalo. Few people listen to exact words, and many a literal truth tells a lie by implication. Who should know that better than a person who always tells the literal truth?"

Sand's pale cheeks were less pale, or his red tie was reflecting more color upward. He said, "What the hell are you implying?"

"I would like to ask you just one question, Mr. Sand? If the members of the club are willing, of course."

"I don't care if they are or not," said Sand, glowering at Henry. "If you take that tone I might not choose to answer."

"You may not have to," said Henry. "The point is that each time you deny having committed the crime, you deny it in precisely the same words. I couldn't help but notice since I made up my mind to listen to your exact words as soon as I

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heard that you never lied. Each time, you said, 'I did not take the cash or the bonds.'"

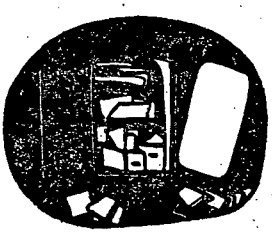
"And that is perfectly true," said Sand loudly.

"I'm sure it is, or you wouldn't have said so," said Henry. "Now this is the question I would like to ask you. Did you, by any chance, take the cash *and* the bonds?"

There was a short silence. Then Sand rose and said, "I'll get my coat now. Goodbye. I remind you all that nothing said here can be repeated outside."

When Sand was gone, Trumbull said, "Well, I'll be damned."

To which Henry replied, "Perhaps not, Mr. Trumbull. Don't despair."



CRIMINALIMERICK

THE CLUBMEN

by D. R. BENSEN

When the Black Widowers dine,
Their guest puts himself on the line,
For his dinner is bought
With a tale that is fraught
With doings bizarre and malign.

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a *NEW* "study in crime" by

JULIAN SYMONS

"When I become excited, you see, my hearing becomes very—very acute." Mr. Small had a curious hearing condition—extraordinary magnification of certain sounds. That was the curious part of it—not all sounds, only certain sounds. Like those his wife Lucy made: they grated, bombarded his ears, jarred his nerves. And like those Marilyn made: they were delicious, delightful—they soothed, caressed, excited. . .

Julian Symons' newest story is a probing and perceptive "study in crime"—a study in the power of life and death . . .

THE SENSITIVE EARS OF MR. SMALL

by JULIAN SYMONS

The kitchen door closed with a slight, yet decisive and deliciously promising click. Mr. Small moved smoothly into his daydream. He got up, went smiling out to the kitchen, discovered Marilyn there in the act of pulling up her stockings. She gave a small protesting but delighted gasp as his arms clasped her from behind. Beneath his hand he heard the soothing sound of fingers on silk . . .

Crunch. His wife's teeth as they bit into toast destroyed the dream. Crunch and crunch again, like a series of mortars exploding. It was a relief when she dipped a spoon into the pot for more marmalade, although the resultant *squelch* was still unpleasant. But then inevitably came another *crunch*, against which he rustled the morning paper in vain.

The attack quite drowned any sound that Marilyn was making in the kitchen. He felt himself unable to bear it. This was a very bad morning. He rose and said he must go. The

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touch of his lips on Lucy's cheek was the briefest possible contact. In the car on the way to the station he said aloud, "It can't go on."

The curious condition of his hearing had existed now for some four months. It had begun, if he liked to put a time to it, just after Marilyn came to work for them three mornings a week. It was as though he felt things through his sense of hearing rather than through his sense of touch; the result was that almost every movement Marilyn made gave him a thrill of pleasure while everything Lucy did, whether it was moving a chair or turning the pages of a magazine, jarred his nerves.

Apart from things done by Marilyn and Lucy his hearing was perfectly normal, which somehow did not make things any better. He tried to explain it to old Dr. Bentham.

"When I become excited, you see, my hearing becomes very—very acute." It did not seem wise to mention Lucy and Marilyn.

Dr. Bentham was old and red-faced. His hand shook a little and his breath smelled of whiskey. He made a cursory examination and said, "Nervous strain. Overworking in the office. The pace we all live at nowadays. Need to slow down a bit. Give you some pills."

The pills had no effect, and within another few days it became clear to Mr. Small that pleasure was associated with Marilyn, pain with Lucy. One was as intense as the other. He began to indulge in daydreams in which the pleasure was accentuated and the pain did not exist . . .

Mr. Small was rather small, although not diminutive. He was 40 years old. Everybody liked him because he was almost always cheerful and placid. His name was Geoffrey, but most people called him Geoff. Friends and acquaintances felt rather sorry for him because Lucy, although a splendid manager and good cook, was inclined to lay down the law about everything and wait for him to agree.

As people said, it was a pity they had no children, although of course they got on terribly well. And at Truwell Hanslit, the firm of manufacturing chemists where Mr. Small was the assistant accountant, he got on terribly well, too, enduring better than anyone else the schoolboy sarcasm of the general manager, Mr. Best. Yes, everybody liked Geoff Small.

On the morning that he had said, "It can't go on," Mr. Small had lunch in the executives'

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restaurant with Grady, the company's chief analytical chemist. Grady, an ebullient Irishman, liked to talk, and there was no better listener than Geoff Small. As a matter of fact, they'd had lunch together quite often in the past month. While Grady talked, Mr. Small noticed that the ordinary restaurant noises did not bother him at all.

Truwell Hanslit manufactured dozens of different branded preparations, from a new cortisone ointment for rashes to a contraceptive pill that was said to have no side effects of any kind. Grady liked talking about these, but he talked rather more about the power held by analytical chemists in general and the importance of his own work in particular.

"Some of the things we work on and then give up, Geoff, you'd never believe. Talk about the power of life and death! You know what the Home Office analysts say."

"What do they say?" Mr. Small inquired timidly.

"Well, they only whisper it, mind you, but everyone knows there are a hundred different laboratory ways of committing undetected murder."

"Poisons, you mean?"

"Not poisons, Geoff, compounds." Grady jabbed with his fork. "There are half a dozen compounds in the lab at this moment that would send somebody off to sleep for good. Experiments, you know, we shan't manufacture them." He gave a great belly laugh. "Next time you're in the lab—"

It happened that Mr. Small had to go across to the laboratory that very afternoon, on a query which proved to be a mistake in the Accounting Department. Grady was delighted to see him and continue their conversation. At the end they made what was almost a conducted tour of the laboratory in which Grady cast a little light on his companion's ignorance. It has been said that Mr. Small was a good listener, and he did not mention to Grady that long ago he had passed a physics examination which naturally included chemistry. His knowledge was haphazard but genuine.

On the way home that evening Mr. Small made a few purchases at three different drug stores. It would be pointless to say what they were, for each of the substances was harmless in itself. On the way back from the station in the car he repeated, "It can't go on."

Mr. Small had always liked puttering about in the kitchen. He did nothing elaborate, but

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he baked bread, made teacakes, and always took up a bedtime drink to Lucy. On the evening after his conversation with Grady he pottered about, then took up not only a sleep-inducing drink but one of the little buns he had just made.

Lucy ate it, and burped. A sound like a shot went through Mr. Small's body. "Too much baking powder," she said.

That night she felt ill. Not very ill, but Mr. Small insisted on calling Dr. Bentham. He came, bad-tempered and sleepy, diagnosed injudicious eating, and gave Lucy a sedative.

On the following morning Marilyn arrived to find Mr. Small making breakfast for Lucy, who was still in bed. He explained that she had had a nasty turn.

"Oh ah." She was a blonde girl, whose parents had died a few years back. She had a slightly crooked smile and a way of looking sideways that was conspiratorial and attractively sly. As she took off her coat, standing close to him, there was a rustle like music.

It seemed the moment to turn the daydream into reality, and he put an arm around her. She seemed to move away, but somehow did not. For a moment his lips met hers, then she did move away.

"Now then." She gave that sideways glance. "What would *she* say?"

The tinkle of her charm bracelet rang through his ears, traveled all over his body. He gulped. "Would you come out one night? To, say, a little dinner?"

"What would *she* say?" Marilyn repeated.

Lucy got up later that day and felt much better. When Dr. Bentham came in to look at her on Saturday morning, she said she was quite fit. The doctor had a couple of stiff whiskies and told her to be careful what she ate.

Mr. Small saw the doctor out to his car and said he knew she was still in pain. The doctor said it was gastritis, but if it went on they'd have to do something about it.

On Sunday they had arranged that a couple of neighbors come in to dinner, and Lucy insisted they should not call it off. The Longleys remembered afterward that Geoff had seemed anxious, and had tried to stop Lucy from having a second helping of roast duck. Marilyn had come in to wash up and she was in the kitchen when Geoff, as usual, made the coffee.

At midnight Lucy felt some pains and Mr. Small went downstairs, as he said, to call the doctor. He was distressed

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about the pains—his chemical knowledge was limited, and he couldn't really be sure about the effects of the white powder that had been the product of his pottering. He had kept it in the kitchen in a small jar labeled *Powder for Wine Making*, which was reasonable enough, because he had previously made parsnip and elderberry wine. Now he locked up the powder in his desk drawer.

He didn't actually call the doctor until half-past one. During that period of an hour and a half he sat in the living room with the door closed and the radio playing so that he could not hear the sounds upstairs.

When Dr. Bentham arrived he was angry, but when he came downstairs he looked grave. The usual unpleasant things were done, but without effect. Mr. Small suggested getting a second medical opinion, but it proved too late for that. The cause of death was stated on the certificate to have been acute gastric inflammation.

Everybody was very sympathetic. Even Best at the office, sarcastic overbearing Best, said he was sorry. Quite a lot of people attended the funeral and several of them came back to the house. Mrs. Longley had arranged a little buffet meal, and Marilyn was there to hand things round.

Mr. Small did not say very much, but his friends said that you could see how he felt. In fact, he hardly heard what was said, because all the time the music of Marilyn's charm bracelet sounded in his ears a message of infinite promise.

After the visitors had gone he could not resist doing what he knew to be unwise. He went out to the kitchen where Marilyn was clearing up and planted a kiss on her neck. It was as soft as roses; in some strange way he did not merely feel the contact but first of all *heard* it. The sound was the most exciting he had ever known.

She half turned but did not disengage herself. "I don't know what you're thinking about," she said. "And her only just buried."

Mr. Small's thoughts were inexpressible. He could only stammer her name. In the end she pushed him away. She said he ought to be ashamed of himself, but that sideways glance seemed to have a different message. Then, enunciating the words carefully, she said she thought it would be better if she did not come in any more. It wouldn't be right.

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He could hardly believe what she said. "But I must—I must see you again."

The sound as she put a hand up to her disarranged hair was beautiful. "You'll be moving out anyway. To a flat."

"Oh, I don't think so. I like to have a house. My wife didn't make a will, you know, and she had a little money."

"Did you say something about taking me out to dinner?" As he moved toward her again she said coolly, "No. And I'm not coming in after the end of this week. It wouldn't be right."

She was as good, or as bad, as her word. He took her out, and saw her almost every evening, but she would not come to the house. Mr. Small was no housekeeper, and the place began to look slovenly. That delightful magnification of every sound she made continued, so that in a way it was always a pleasure to be with her; but in another way he knew he was being cheated.

At the end of three weeks they were married by special license, with witnesses brought in from the street. Immediately after the wedding they left for a honeymoon in Venice. There Mr. Small experienced the joys he had contemplated, which proved after all not to be so very joyful. His sensual experiences seemed to be inextricably linked to the extreme sensitivity of his hearing, and after a few days in Marilyn's company her movements and gestures were less vividly heard. By the end of the honeymoon her voice, which was—what else could you call it?—common, had begun to grate on his ears.

When they moved back to the house she got rid of all Lucy's curtains and chair covers and some of the carpets. She said the place needed brightening up. The replacements were in various shades of tangerine and pink, with an occasional essay into burnt gold. Mr. Small had not realized that the colors of furnishings could jar the whole nervous system, but this proved to be the case. He not only *saw* these horrid colors but *heard* them too, and he did not like the sounds.

And yet beyond this he had a deep sense of comfort when he thought about the powder in his desk drawer. Mr. Small had not done many positive things in his life, and it was comforting to feel a kind of power.

He was distressed to find that his popularity had suddenly disappeared. The Longleys came in one evening for drinks, but it was not a success. After they had left, Marilyn said that

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they were a stuck-up lot round here, why didn't they move? Mr. Small replied that he had no intention of moving.

After all, he had the money—it turned out that Lucy had a nest egg he knew nothing about—and it was a pleasure to dig his toes in. Marilyn shrugged, became sluttish, watched TV all evening, and ate box after box of chocolates. Mr. Small refused to have anybody in to help with the housework, and more often than not it didn't get done.

At the office, too, life was not easy. Grady was still friendly, but Mr. Small rather avoided contact with him, and Best had reverted to type and become his old intolerable self. He was always making references in execrable taste, saying that he hoped Mr. Small got plenty of home comforts, and suggesting that he looked extremely tired mornings.

These remarks were often made in the presence of junior members of the staff who seemed to find them funny, and in the end Mr. Small decided to act. He still did some home cooking and often brought in teacakes for the morning "break." One day he persuaded Best to have a teacake. There were two to choose from, and Best took the one intended for him.

Mr. Small smiled a private smile when he learned that the general manager had gone home after lunch, feeling extremely unwell. He was away the next day and still looked greenish when he returned. Power had been exercised, honor satisfied. The jokes didn't hurt any more.

It was in the following week that Mr. Small, passing through the typing pool, heard a sound that made a shiver of delight pass through his ears and vibrate like a gong in the region of his solar plexus. It recurred, and he identified its source as a new young typist. She was sniffling, and it was the most delicious sniffle he had ever heard.

He took her to lunch in the canteen and learned that her name was Jennifer. The sniffle appeared to be a natural asset, not the result of a cold. Mr. Small felt that he could listen to it forever. He thought of asking her out for the evening, but decided against it.

He was not shocked or even surprised when, that evening, Marilyn took a chocolate from a box and he heard, with the magnification given by a stethoscope, the rustle of the paper which sounded as though somebody was tearing silk, and the *crunch* of teeth on chocolate which was like a drill attacking rock.

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"Why are you looking at me as though I am a freak?" she asked. "What's wrong with me?"

"Nothing," Mr. Small said softly. "There's nothing wrong at all."

"Well, there is something wrong and I'll tell you what." What could her voice be compared to—a file screeching on metal? "There's nothing to do in this damned place! And we never go out now. I'm sick of it."

"I thought perhaps we might go on a holiday."

"A holiday?"

"Perhaps on a cruise."

She stared at him, with that sideways calculating look he had once found so attractive. "It would make a change. But can you get the time off?"

He said he could, although he knew very well he couldn't. He had taken his yearly holiday for their honeymoon and they had been married only six months. It would have been nice if what he thought of as "the event" could take place on a cruise, but it was really not important. Afterward it might be advisable to move from the neighborhood. Perhaps Jennifer would like the idea of a flat?

He unlocked his desk and stared at the powder. He found that he was looking forward to "the event."

He had given up drinking coffee, but a couple of nights after their talk about the cruise he took Marilyn to the cinema and then made coffee for them both. In the night she felt ill, and he suggested getting Dr. Bentham, but she said no. She was so vehement about hating doctors that he did nothing.

After all, it was not necessary for this trial run, as he thought of it. Grady had said that a post-mortem in the case of this compound would reveal nothing but symptoms of unsuspected cardiac trouble; on the other hand, it might be as well if the circumstances did not precisely repeat those in Lucy's case.

The following day something disconcerting happened. Jennifer said she was too busy to come to lunch; but then he passed her as she was going into the canteen with two other girls. After he had gone by he heard their laughter, like the cackle of monkeys. In the past such an incident would have embarrassed him, but now he felt the swell of anger. At some time little Jennifer would have to be taught a lesson; but that could wait.

When he got home Marilyn was on the sofa watching television. She said she felt better and was coy, almost kittenish, as she pulled him

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down beside her. Soon after their marriage he had bought her a pair of gold bangles, and now he winced as they clattered against each other.

"How about that cruise, Geoff?"

He felt every movement she made—the harsh touch of her thighs, the rub of her dress on the sofa, the shriek of her right-hand index finger as it rubbed his left-hand thumbnail. His ears were assaulted so violently that at first he could not reply. Then he said faintly that it was all settled, they would get the tickets next week.

He unlocked the drawer of his desk and took out the powder. It would have to be tonight.

He took the coffee in to the living room. Marilyn continued to be kittenish, saying now that she wanted brown and not white sugar. He fetched it for her. A sense of power and ease flowed through him as she raised the cup to her lips. Now it was a question of waiting, nothing more.

Later he lay in bed with the light out, staring up into the blackness. Marilyn was totally silent, yet with his wonderfully attuned ears he could hear the sibilation of her breath. Who had written something about hearing the press of an ant's foot on grass? He could have heard that, too. He looked at his watch. The time was ten minutes after midnight.

"Are you all right?" he whispered, and the words came back immediately like an echo. "Are you?"

At these two innocuous whispered words he experienced a feeling that could not be identified exactly, a feeling that combined apprehension and discomfort. Her next words were also whispered. "I drank your coffee. You drank mine."

For a few moments the words were meaningless, then he understood them, and at the moment of understanding, the discomfort changed to a pain that gripped his body as though a giant crab had gripped his chest with one claw and his stomach with another. Electric lights struck at his eyes, and Marilyn was spitting at him like some great cat.

"Did you think I was fool enough to let you get rid of me the way you got rid of her?" He gasped something and tried to get out of bed, but his legs seemed made of soft plastic. "I was in the kitchen when you were making coffee that night. Do you think I didn't see what you were doing? *Powder for Wine Making.* You dirty little devil."

The words grated like a rake

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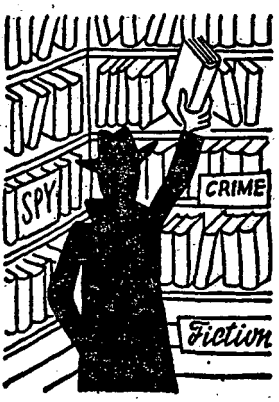
over gravel. He started to say something. Then the pain came again, and he stopped.

"I thought you'd spend money, not throw it about like a man with no hands. But I've been watching to see if you tried anything." She put on her dressing gown. "There's no will. So I'm your heir."

"Call the doctor." With a supreme effort he managed to swing his legs out of bed. She came and pushed him back.

"Not yet." She looked at her watch. "I reckon you waited more than an hour before you rang old Bentham. I'll make it two. And now I've got to wash up the dinner things. *And* the coffee cups." She held up something bright and shining in her hand. A key. "I don't think you'll be any trouble from the look of you, but better safe than sorry."

As she went out, a lightning stroke of pain—much worse than what he had experienced before—split his body; and at the same moment he heard, like a roll of thunder—terrible, decisive, final—the turning of the key in the lock.



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We published Jeff Sweet's first story, "Nightmare in New York," in our August 1971 issue, and it proved to be one of the best-liked first stories of last year. Now, in his second story, Mr. Sweet offers us something entirely different—always a good sign in the work of a new writer. "The Cop Who Liked Old Movies" is a straight detective story—an even better sign in the work of a new writer. And to put a maraschino cherry atop the sundae, the story has an interesting background, especially for these days . . . Are you a nostalgia buff? . . .

THE COP WHO LIKED OLD MOVIES

by JEFF SWEET

Detective Lieutenant Robbins is a cop who can talk your ear off about old movies. For instance, I remember mentioning to him I'd seen the old Orson Welles mystery flick, *Touch of Evil*, on TV the night before, and first thing I knew, he was giving me a lecture how it was Joseph Cotten who played the doctor in the first scene but didn't get billing and how Welles had based his screenplay on a book he'd never even read.

Fascinating, huh? Maybe if you're a film critic or a nostalgia buff or one of those kids from N.Y.U. you see on practically every street corner with a 16mm. movie camera making The Great American Film and blocking traffic. Me, I just like to pay my couple of bucks, see the show, munch the popcorn, and when I come out of the theater, forget about it. I mean, movies are movies and real life is real life and I'm a cop and, let's face it, I've got more important things to do than wonder who clipped King Kong's toenails.

But, like I say, Lieutenant Robbins is a movie freak. Which is why it seemed sort of right that he should be the one put on the George Nacio case.

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George Nacio, for those of you who haven't memorized the credits of every film epic since Edison, was a hot-shot producer, and not well loved by all. This last fact became apparent in a very graphic way when one night he was found lying face down, and between his shoulder blades there was another blade which nature hadn't provided, four inches long and very sharp.

So, of course, what we wanted to know was who placed said object therein. One of the ways to start would have been to make a list of everyone who had it in for the late great. Which, if we'd done it, would still have me occupied at this moment, for Mr. Nacio had not won his nickname of "Nacio the Nazi" for nothing.

Besides, another approach presented itself—the fact that the street door to the town-house in which the late Mr. Nacio had his New York apartment was always kept locked. The way you got in was you rang his doorbell, he pressed the intercom button, you identified yourself, then if he wanted to see you, he pressed the lock-release button which, while it buzzed, let you open the door. Of course, all this wasn't necessary if you had a key. Once you were through the outside door, you climbed the stairs to the second floor, where you knocked on his apartment door and were let in.

Now, we knew how many times Nacio buzzed the buzzer that night because of a couple named Charles and Ada Compden whose apartment was on the first floor and who were the building's only other tenants. As Mr. Compden demonstrated for us, the buzzer was so loud he could hear it very clearly through his wall. He and Mrs. Compden had been in all evening and were absolutely certain that Nacio had buzzed only twice that night. So the logical thing to do was to find out who'd been buzzed up those two times.

Which was pretty simple because Nacio's guests told us. One caller was a tall thin guy with his long hair combed back from a receding hairline; name of Thatcher Freed. The other was Pamela Kelly, the actress, and if I have to tell you what she looks like, then you probably haven't seen a movie or TV show or read a newspaper or magazine in the past five years. The only other person who'd had access to the apartment was Nacio's son, Edward. He was visiting his dad at the time and, of course, he had a key. He was in his thirties and looked a bit like Peter Lawford.

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I'm going to have to look at my notes to tell you what they said when we questioned them.

Freed: said he was a director. He'd come to discuss a movie project he was working on with Nacio. Seems in his contract Freed had been promised the right to make the final cut, which means the way he put the picture together was the way it was supposed to run in the theater. The way he'd put the picture together, however, it had been given an X rating, which did not please Nacio because it meant smaller box office since kids couldn't see it.

Nacio was in the middle of having some of the sex scenes taken out of the film so that the rating could be changed to an R. Freed insisted this was spoiling the picture as well as violating the contract. Nacio refused to give an inch. Discussion was not friendly. Freed arrived at 9:00 on the nose and left around 11:30. Arrival time confirmed by Edward Nacio, the son, who was in the apartment at the time. Departure not confirmed as no one but the deceased was present then. But Freed insisted he left Nacio alive.

How we stood: Freed had both motive and opportunity. Quite possible Freed made the final cut on Nacio.

Miss Kelly: she read an item in the paper saying the lead she'd been signed to play in another of Nacio's pictures had been given to someone else by his order. She arrived about 10:15 and had a real shouting match with Nacio until he pushed her out before 11:00. Arrival and departure times confirmed by Freed.

How we stood: Miss Kelly had motive. Opportunity, apparently not.

Edward Nacio: said he left the place after Freed arrived, around 10:10. Went to (where else?) the movies. The 10:30 show at the Sam (as in "Play it again, Sam") Theater, which specializes in running old flicks.

Of course Lieutenant Robbins asked what movie and Edward told him *Summer Holiday*, which got the lieutenant all excited. Robbins had only seen the picture once, a long time ago on television; but after *Singin' in the Rain* and *It's Always Fair Weather*, it was his favorite musical.

He started chatting with Nacio about it, which I must confess struck me as a little ludicrous. Here Nacio's dad had just been carted off to the morgue, and he and Robbins were talking trivia, Robbins saying how great Mickey Rooney was in it and Nacio agreeing, Robbins asking if the

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color was as terrific as the critics had said and Nacio saying it was even better.

Finally Robbins got back on the track. Nacio had been at the Sam Theater from 10:30 to past 12:00. Could anyone confirm this? Nacio thought for a second, then said the cashier at the movie theater knew him and he'd talked with her before and after the film, so he was pretty sure she'd remember him. He got back to the apartment about 12:30, found his father dead, and called the police.

After we'd finished talking to him and conferring with the others working on the case, Robbins and I sat down in an all-night coffee shop and looked over our notes.

"Thatcher Freed looks like a good possibility," commented the lieutenant. "As you say, both motive and opportunity."

"What about Miss Kelly?" I asked. "She's got motive, too. Of course, there's the problem about the opportunity angle. She said she left before eleven, Freed confirmed it, and the doctor says Nacio was killed between eleven and twelve."

"There's another possibility," said Robbins. "The lock on the street door can be set in an unlocked position by simply turning the switch about a quarter way around."

"Oh, I get it," I said. "She turns the switch as she leaves and waits outside for Freed to go. Then, since the street door is unlocked, she has no trouble getting back into the building without buzzing. She goes upstairs, knocks on Nacio's door. He opens it. She comes in, let's say to apologize. Then, when his back is turned, she gives him the very violent back scratch."

Robbins nodded. "Then she comes downstairs again, re-switches the switch on the street door so that it locks after her, and beats it."

"Yeah, that could work," I said. "What about Ed Nacio?"

"I checked *Summer Holiday* in a film reference book," said the lieutenant. "It runs ninety-two minutes, which is consistent with what he told us about his arrival and departure times from the theater. The only question now is if the cashier confirms his alibi. So, tomorrow we go to the movies."

The Sam Theater is a small place in the Village, seating two to three hundred people. We arrived at one, just before the first show, and talked to the cashier, a young lady named Gloria Brown.

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Nacio came here for the ten-thirty show last night and left just after twelve."

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"Why were you still here at twelve?" Robbins asked. "You don't sell tickets after the beginning of the last show, do you?"

"No," she said, "I don't. But ten thirty wasn't the last show, twelve fifteen was. A lot of the Village crowd like to hit the late show."

"What about inside the house?" asked Robbins. "Are there exit doors he might have left by and then used to sneak back in?"

"There are exit doors," said Miss Brown, "but there's also an usher inside to make sure that nobody comes through them."

Robbins nodded, satisfied. "Well," he said, "while we're here, why don't we catch some of *Summer Holiday?*"

"Do you think we ought to?" I asked.

"Of course," said Robbins. "It's part of our investigation."

"All right," I said, "but I want to go to the men's room first."

"I'll meet you inside," he said.

A few minutes later I had finished in the john and was heading to join the lieutenant when suddenly he burst through the double doors into the lobby. He spotted me. "Come on!" he said, as he dashed toward the front doors. "We've got work to do!"

"I don't understand," I said, catching up with him. "What's happened?"

"Do you remember last night when Ed Nacio and I were talking about *Summer Holiday?*"

"Yes," I said. "What about it?"

"Do you remember when he told me how beautiful the color was?"

"What about it?" I said again.

"The print they're running here is in black-and-white!"

Well, as it turned out, Ed Nacio was the one. He hadn't gone to the theater the night before, but had waited for Freed to leave and then returned to the apartment and killed his father. He'd paid Miss Brown to give him an alibi and had checked an old paper for a review of *Summer Holiday*, which is where he got the bit about the color being so terrific. Of course, he didn't know that the Sam would run a black-and-white version. When confronted with Lieutenant Robbins' accusation and proof, Nacio and the girl made full confessions. His motive was the classic one: desperate need of money.

But there was still something puzzling me.

"Lieutenant," I asked, "if

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Summer Holiday was originally made in color like you said, how come the Sam Theater was showing it in black-and-white?"

"Back in the early days of television," he explained, "when the TV stations bought prints of films, it would have been more expensive for them to buy color prints of films that were going to be shown in black-and-white anyway. So the movies made black-and-white prints especially for TV broadcasting. And now, if you'll excuse me—"

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I'm going to write the manager and owner of the Sam Theater," he answered. "They have one hell of a nerve charging people two and a half bucks and running a TV print!"

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a *NEW* crime story by

URSULA CURTISS

A marked man being sought by the police—a desperate man hiding out in an empty house—sanctuary, refuge, safety—and then the criminal noticed something exceedingly odd—"something very strange had happened in this house"...

THE MARKED MAN

by URSULA CURTISS

Outside, in the cold rush of the night air, the left side of Walter's face felt iridescent with pain. The just-inflicted scratches seemed to seethe and simmer like neon tubing and at an occasional pair of oncoming headlights, he'd swing his head sharply out of the glare, as if he were summoning a laggardly dog in the shadows. His heart hammered as though he'd been running, which was the one thing he should not do.

The service station where the girl attendant lay unconscious on the floor—the girl who had astonishingly revealed herself as such only when her billed cap flew off with the suddenness of her jump at him—was now six or seven blocks behind him, and there was still no sound of a siren, no racing, revolving ambulance light. But the expectation of them was like an aimed gun, because although Walter had already disposed of the cheap dark mail-order wig, he was literally a marked man. For the first time in his life he needed a safe place to hide for a few days, and to find that he had to locate a telephone booth, and fast.

Gulping for air even at his only brisk walking pace, he arrived at a telephone booth at the entrance to a closed and spectrally lit shopping plaza. He ruffled through the L's in the chained directory, was seized with panic when he appeared not to have a single coin, finally dredged up a quarter, dropped it in, and dialed. A kind of desperate confidence had carried him this far, but the moment of panic had undermined it and let in a thought

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that he had kept at bay since he'd fled from the service station: *What if Dex was out of town? Or had moved?*

His face flamed while he waited; he hoped viciously that the girl on the concrete floor was dead. Then an elderly female voice quavered a hello into his ear and he asked for Dex.

The voice hesitated. "He's—busy right now. Could I have him call you back—say, tomorrow?"

A party? No, but something was going on—he heard a low mutter of background sounds. "I'm just passing through. Tell him it's Walt," said Walter firmly, and a moment later the familiar voice was saying warily, unwelcomingly, "Hi, Walt."

A measure of Walter's usual cockiness came back, even in the middle of this crisis. Good old Dex, met at the reformatory in the southern part of the state, where Walter had been sent for aggravated assault and Dex for theft during one of his many flights from a broken home. Dex was 24 now, the older by a year, but like most essentially gentle people he was vulnerable. He was also married, with a baby, and assistant manager of his father-in-law's small but thriving grocery store. It had been very clear to Walter, who took care to keep in touch with anyone potentially useful, that neither Dex's prim little wife nor his hatchet-faced father-in-law knew of his reformatory past.

Now, tersely and without details, Walter told the other man that he was in a jam and needed a place to stay—garage, woodshed, anywhere—for a couple of days. Dex replied with the caution of someone with a listener beside him that he wished he could put Walter up but the fact was that his wife's mother had passed away the day before and Walter could see that, uh . . .

"Say, that's an idea. Your wife has lived in this town all her life. She'd probably know of some empty house for sale or something, wouldn't she, if you asked her? I mean if you told her it was for an old friend?"

For a dangerous interval of silence Walter was afraid he had gone too far with the implied threat. Then Dex said in a driven voice, "There's one place that might—where are you now?"

While he waited for the car, Walter tidied up the telephone booth, a process he had automatically begun while talking to Dex. Brought up by an elderly aunt as clean and joyless as bleach, further stampeded by the harsh institutional years, he

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had an active unease—almost a fear—of dirt and disorder. Although he himself was hardly aware of it, public places like washrooms and park benches and telephone booths were always the cleaner for Walter's passing. By the time Dex's car arrived, two cigarette butts, three matches, two gum wrappers, and a paper cup had been amalgamated into a small neat ball and thrown outside into a litter basket.

After a single instantly averted glance at the bloody marks on Walter's face, Dex confined himself to essentials. The house he had in mind would be empty for a week because the owners had gone deer hunting; he knew this because the woman, a Mrs. Patterson, had been in the store yesterday buying supplies and he had heard her talking to the checkout girl. He didn't think there was a dog. He had brought a flashlight. Beyond that, Walter was on his own.

As he finished these stony announcements a siren commenced to shriek miles away to the south, the urgent sound carrying on the cold dry air. Dex kept his eyes unflickeringly on the road ahead, his only and instinctive reaction a sudden pressure on the gas pedal. Rejection came from him almost as visibly as the simmers of heat from above a radiator, but he said nothing until he pulled in without warning under cottonwoods.

"Far as I go," he said then. "Second house on the right. For God's sake watch it."

"Don't worry," Walter told him, confident because of the distance between him and the siren. "You've got nothing to do with this, right? Somebody else overheard the woman and the checkout girl. So long, Dex."

"Goodbye," said Dex tightly, and drove away.

It was a very good house for the purpose, 25 yards back from the road with at least that much separation from its neighbors on both sides, and cupped in trees. If the neighbors had dogs they were the sleepy overfed kind: the only sound Walter could hear as he advanced cautiously on the grass was a faint twiggy rustle of wind high above him.

He melted to the rear of the house, his now-adjusted vision able to pick out details other than the black shine of panes. The back door was sturdily resistant; the windows appeared to be the kind that louvered out. Walter traveled along the wall and presently found another door opening on what felt like flagstones. The lock

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here gave with only a minimum of attention from his knife and he was inside in total darkness and utter silence.

A faint trace of perfume on the air, a fluffiness underfoot: although both were alien to Walter, he knew that this must be a bedroom. After moments of testing with all his senses—not that he believed Dex daring enough for treachery—he aimed the flashlight cautiously between shielding fingers, snapped it instantly off again, stood frozen with the image of the rumpled double bed still seared on his vision. The illusion of a suspicious householder risen to investigate the rooms within was fleetingly so strong that Walter's hand shot behind him for the doorknob.

But nothing happened; the darkness and silence remained tranquil. After a guarded moment he tiptoed through the open doorway that the brief spurt of light had showed him, found himself in a hall, and listened again. Then, because alarm had made his face blaze as though the girl's nails had just bitten into it, he fumbled his way to a bathroom, ran the cold water boldly, and held his dripping palms to it.

He had committed several robberies before this one, and in fact served a short jail term; but until tonight he had never used more than the threat of violence. He had never had to: his victims had the impression—false, as it happened—that he was completely irresponsible, and heedless as to the consequences of his actions.

As a result, he was suddenly so exhausted that he did not even count the bills wadded deep in his jacket pocket under his gloves. He lay down on the unmade bed, faintly shocking to his neat nature even through his fatigue, and was asleep almost at once.

In the morning Walter took an appraising look around the bedroom and discovered that the untidy Pattersons were well-off—not that it mattered to him, as his object was to leave this place without a trace as soon as his scratches were healed enough to be disguised with makeup. He also learned that the money the girl had defended so wildly and stupidly amounted to $81.

. . . the girl who (the bedroom clock-radio informed him through the open doorway while he shaved and washed his damaged cheek with care) is still unconscious and in critical condition in a local hospital. Her head injuries indicate that she was flung with considerable violence against the corner of a metal filing cabinet. The robbery, which occurred at some

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time between 10:30 and 10:50 P.M., appears thus far to have gone unwitnessed. Police are continuing their inquiries in the area—

Walter turned the radio off. The fact that Dex had undoubtedly been listening to the news did not worry him in the least; if anything, the fact of the girl's condition would make the other man all the more sweatingly anxious that his own part in this never came out.

And when—and if—the girl recovered consciousness she could only describe her assailant as having dark hair and brows. Walter's hair was fair, and without the burnt-match coloring his eyebrows were almost invisible. When the scratches had healed he would be able to saunter down to the bus station, retrieve his shabby suitcase from the locker there, use his already-bought ticket to Denver, and be on his way—free as air. Cheered, Walter set out for the first time to explore his temporary domain.

Three minutes later he almost called Dex at the grocery store; only the realization that it might be dangerous for anyone to find this number busy stopped him. Because something very strange had happened in this house.

If it had been another kind of house, Walter would have said jeeringly to himself that they had had some party the night before. But in that case you would expect to see liquor bottles about—and something told him that people who lived in houses like this did not give parties like that.

There were two bedrooms, apparently occupied by children, besides the one by which he had entered, and another smaller bath; a long deep kitchen, a dining room with three railed steps down into a big living room; and opening off that, a den.

Everywhere there were costly looking mirrors and rugs and pictures—and everywhere, drawers were not quite closed on their brimming contents and cabinets hung slightly open. In one child's room a sharp scuffle had evidently taken place, knocking the sliding closet doors off their runners and dragging the bedclothes half onto the floor.

Stunned, frightened, careful to stay out of range of the windows that faced the road, Walter checked the front-door lock and then the one in the rear. Both were firmly set. Then how—?

An echo of his own soothing words to Dex came back: "Somebody else overheard the woman and the checkout girl."

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Somebody had, and had got in somehow, and the thing right now was to make sure that they didn't return. His back prickling whenever he had to turn it on an open doorway, Walter explored deeper and found, in a utility room off the kitchen, a wall ladder which led up into a little room apparently used by a child at some time. There was a canvas cot, a vase of long-dead flowers, a faded cloth doll. And a door, now stirring gently in the morning air, that gave on the long flat roof and the accommodating branches of a cottonwood tree.

Kids, thought Walter with a great rush of relief as he fastened the hook-and-eye that secured the door. Seeing the Patterson family depart in a laden car or camper, deciding that the coast was clear for some casual mischief or vandalism: you read about such things in the newspapers almost daily. That explained the strange disorder below, and also the apparent lack of theft—Walter had counted two television sets, at least three radios, and a typewriter in the bedroom.

The active threat that the house had seemed to contain was now gone. Descending to the kitchen, Walter investigated the refrigerator and found the remnants that a woman might decide were too little to take on a camping trip and too much to throw away: half a loaf of bread, a half stick of butter, four eggs, a partly used jar of strawberry jam. No milk. Walter drank his instant coffee black, scrambled two eggs, and put jam on a slice of bread.

He cleaned up carefully after himself, not touching the litter he found on the long cream-colored formica counters; the earlier intruders, possibly known to the Pattersons, might admit to the soup—there was a pot with withering dregs—and the generous strewings of orange peel. Distasteful though it was, Walter had to leave the disorder alone.

And he would certainly not allow his nerves to be ruffled by the untidiness everywhere else.

But it was a long day. The graveled crescent driveway crunched noisily three times—twice with cars turning around, once with a panel truck disgorging a boy who trundled around to the rear of the house with a sack of whatever they put in water-softeners. Walter held himself flinchingly still against a wall, expecting a knock at the back door; but there was a distant thump and bang and the boy returned to the truck and drove away.

According to the three o'clock news the girl in the service station, Emma Bothwell,

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had not regained consciousness and was in surgery. A hospital spokesman said there was evidence she had marked her assailant.

Angry at that all over again, Walter went and inspected his scratches, three and a trailing fourth. They had dried and darkened a little, which he took to be a healthy sign, and there was no spreading redness. He then roamed the house at a safe distance from the windows, and grimly did not restore to its rack a man's tie flung over one of the sapphire-upholstered dining-room chairs, did not snatch the weird collection of rubber bands out of the silver tray on the table, or brush off what looked like a wanton sprinkle of sugar on the table top.

At a quarter of five, because he would not be able to move about freely after dark, he opened a can of chili and ate it cold. At five o'clock the telephone rang for the first time.

The sound was terrifying in this refuge, carrying as it did a suggestion that someone was testing the emptiness of this house—or that Dex was warning him of imminent capture. But Dex would know that Walter couldn't lift the receiver. Dex would come himself.

If he had time to.

What if the Pattersons had cut their hunting trip short for some reason and had just stopped at Dex's grocery store for things like milk and butter and eggs? What if this were Dex with a helpless message?—"They're on their way home."

Walter had actually taken a step toward the telephone when it cut itself off in mid-scream. Some friend of the Pattersons who didn't know they were away, he told himself—telephones must be ringing constantly in empty houses—but he put on his jacket and stood tensely in the now-dark dining room, gazing through the half-drawn curtains at occasional passing headlights.

At the end of a long half hour he considered himself safe from this particular threat, but the deep uneasiness stayed with him and carried over into his sleep.

It was a cold windy night, and the trees around the house creaked with a sound like keys being inserted into locks. The faraway howl of a dog became a woman's advancing voice and brought Walter sitting up with his heart pounding. At some black hour later he came fully awake again with a thought that must have been hovering around the edges of his mind all day.

There was, he was almost

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sure, something called immunity—some means by which police protected informers. Walter's sole guarantee of Dex's continuing silence was the other man's fear at being an accessory; but mightn't the police shut their eyes to that in return for Walter, in view of all the fuss being kicked up about the girl? Dex wasn't very bright—anyone with brains would have told his wife about the reformatory at the outset, so as to remove that hold; but it might still occur to him that he could lead the police to Walter at almost no risk to himself. He might even emerge looking like a hero, reformatory or not.

By mid-morning of his second day in it, Walter had developed a personal hatred for the Patterson house. He had told himself that he would not let the general dishevelment get on his nerves, but in his restless wandering he yanked the door of the child's room shut; that was one place he didn't have to look at. A genuine rage at the marauders rose up in him, accompanied by a woolly feeling that he was missing some very important point.

Twice before noon he was startled by crunching tires in the drive, but although the cars passed close to the front windows they went by at undiminished speed. This seemed to be a natural turning-around spot, and Walter added it to his list of grievances against the house.

After his lunch—at least the pantry was well-stocked—he made the ritual inspection of his scratches and experimented with some liquid makeup he found on a bathroom shelf. The scratches stared through, and the trouble was that they did not look like an encounter with a cat or some barbed wire; they looked exactly like what they were. Walter added another layer of makeup and thought that by tomorrow night . . .

The one o'clock news, which he watched on the television set in the curtained bedroom, jarred him to total attention, because the girl in the hospital was holding a news conference. With a thin prominent-jawed face surmounted by bandages, she looked more like a boy than ever. Blurred backs kept getting in the way as she spoke—eerily, for this was the first time Walter had heard her voice.

"I think he was about twenty-one or twenty-two. He had dark hair. He had on a dark jacket—I don't remember what color his pants were. Yes, he was wearing gloves, darkish gloves I think," she said to some off-camera question, "and when he told me to give him the money he took one glove

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off, I don't know why. I jumped at him, because I knew my uncle kept a gun in the desk—that was behind him—and I thought—"

Walter had stopped listening. He was staring at the television screen in a paralysis of horror. Once again, in a sick dream that sent the blood to his face and made the scratches flame, he felt the tiny menacing prick in the palm of his right glove as he opened the office door—was it a tumbleweed thorn? In the same awful slow motion he watched the girl's submissiveness at the cash register, although he hadn't known she was a girl then, and saw himself remove the glove with its threatening little stab so that he could more securely take the bills she was about to hand him.

But no matter how hard he tried, he did not see himself put on the glove after that lightning attack. Instead, he felt the dry slither of the money he had fumbled out with his bare and shaking hand.

What had he done then? Closed the cash drawer? Touched anything else? Out of that tiny interval of unexpected violence and pain and everything gone wrong, it was impossible for him to remember.

As though he could silence the girl forever, Walter leaped to the television set and snapped it off. His hands had begun to tremble, and he locked them tightly together and walked calmingly up and down. *This* was the blurry issue he hadn't quite grasped earlier, this was what had to be faced. Would the Pattersons, returning to their untidy house, accept it for the mischief it was—or, having picked up a newspaper or listened to a car radio, assume at once that a fugitive had been in hiding here, and send for the police?

Walter's fingerprints were a matter of record, and there was hardly a place in the house where he hadn't left them. The robbery would be secondary to the police by now; they would be haring after him for aggravated assault, at the least.

Wait. All this presumed that the Pattersons found their home in this shocking condition. What if they *didn't* find it in a shocking condition? Walter certainly couldn't leave it exactly as they left it, but first impressions would probably be clouded by the commotion of a return with children. By the time Mrs. Patterson's eye fell on something odd in the arrangement of her ashtrays or frying pans, Walter's fingerprints would have been smeared and overlaid and polished out of existence.

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With a vast relief he began to clean up the house.

It was a staggering job, but his spirits began to lift as he got the surface disorder—the straggling tie, a ball of string, the bunched rubber bands, an empty flowerpot—out of the living and dining rooms and into what he hoped were appropriate places. With a little forcing he coaxed drawers and cabinets to close everywhere. When he had swept the floors, the rugs seemed to have a visible overlay of tiny confetti-like debris and he had to get out the vacuum cleaner.

The cleared tops of tables showed strange little sticky places which required sponging, and only the extreme urgency of his situation made Walter tackle the worse of the two children's rooms. His ingrained vision here was of taut tight mitred sheets and blankets, with toys and games, if any, tucked out of sight. It did not include spilled popcorn, an empty Coca-Cola can stuck jauntily in an open bureau drawer, or a yawning closet which looked as though it had been stirred by an eggbeater.

It was almost dark when Walter finished, but the dining-room table gleamed, the living-room couches were unsullied, the floor shone. The house would certainly not have passed the antiseptic eye of Walter's aunt or the grim glare of the matrons in the reformatory, but nobody entering it would cry out in shock. Exhausted but pleased, his nerves quieted by the new orderliness, Walter consumed a can of the Pattersons' soup and went to bed.

In the morning he heard, but was not alarmed by, one more turning-around car that crunched, paused, and crunched away again.

Anne Merrick had swung her little car briskly into her sister's driveway. The hunting trip, irresistible to the Pattersons, would be followed in less than a week by a visit from the senior Pattersons, a gentle and elderly couple from New Jersey who had never been allowed to see the house in its normal state. There were things to be done before even the stoutest-hearted cleaning woman could be brought in. Anne had volunteered.

The Pattersons lived in a manner uniquely their own, only partly explained by the fact that Betsy was a free-lance writer. They had tree surgeons to minister to their trees and sent their Orientals off to be cleaned at the proper intervals; occasionally, after some unheralded visitor had happened

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in on a scene of chaos, they laid down stern rules for their three young children: no eating in the living room, keep your bedroom tidy, hang up your clothes.

For perhaps 48 hours both the children and the parents observed these strictures, and then fell back into their cheerful disorderly habits. Once every six months, for a week at a time, Betsy Patterson and a cleaning woman attacked the bulging closets and brimming drawers, and then the tranquil process of deterioration began all over again.

Anne, remembering the condition of the house three mornings ago when she had helped Betsy and Rob and the children get packed and away, thought now that a fast hour ought to do it. She wasn't aiming at actual cleanliness, after all, but only at the impression that rational people lived here. Bare surfaces were marvelously deceptive. If she made a lightning sweep through the living room and the—

—dining room, with the curtains at its low window half drawn to reveal the shining black walnut table and the immaculate sapphire chairs. Anne's hand stopped sharply before taking out the ignition key.

Three days ago the dining-room table had worn a heavy sprinkle of salt—Adam, the youngest of the children, could never pass a salt-cellar without upending it—but now the table gleamed. So did the silver tray, innocent of the rubber bands dumped into it at the last minute because Betsy had said firmly she would not travel in a vehicle containing children *and* rubber bands. And what had become of Rob's discarded tie, which Anne remembered clearly because the burgundy and gray stripes had looked so decorative against the sapphire chairs?

For a sickening second it was almost as though the Pattersons themselves had been wiped and polished away. Anne's impulse was to race out of the driveway; instead, because it seemed imperative for some reason, she forced herself to leave at the same speed at which she had entered. Two minutes later, at a telephone in the next house, she explained matters to a bewildered voice at the Sheriff's office.

"*Not* ransacked, you say," repeated the deputy uncomprehendingly; without knowing it, he was much in Walter's position. "Then what seems to be the trouble?"

"The trouble is that my sister's house *always* looks ransacked, and now it *doesn't*

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and there has to be something very wrong," said Anne, unfairly impatient. "There's been someone in there, don't you see? I wish to heaven you'd hurry. They might still be there—"

Walter was feeling almost tranquil as he applied a second coat of liquid makeup to his nearly healed cheek; the order around him, after the antic condition of the house, was like balm. Even when he heard a brisk sound from the region of the front door, a sound of entry, his heart gave a horrible knock but he did not panic.

A friend or relative with a key? The Pattersons themselves, returning earlier than planned? No matter; his foresight and drudgery of the night before had insured against an immediate alarm, and he had a choice of two rear doors.

He used the door in the bedroom, closed it soundlessly behind him, backed over flagstones into the chest of a man as careful and quiet as he. But this one—how could it *be*, after all his labor?—this one had a badge and a hand at his holstered hip.

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An incident on a big-city street . . .

ENCOUNTER

by SYD HOFF

The two men caught up with Joey as he stood on the corner waiting for a traffic light to change. They pinned him tightly between them so that he couldn't move.

"This is a gun pressing against your ribs," said one of the men in Joey's ear. The man's voice was cold and deadly.

"Just act as if nothing is happening," said the second man, equally menacing.

They crossed the street with other pedestrians, seeming merely to be three people going in the same direction.

"There must be some mistake," said Joey. "I have exactly two dollars and thirty-six cents on me."

His captors stared straight ahead.

"If you have an idea this attaché case of mine contains anything of value, like diamonds or securities, you'll be disappointed in that, too. All it holds, I'm afraid, is a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, my usual lunch."

A grunt was the only comment Joey heard, or perhaps there were two grunts.

"Oh, I know! Mr. Stoner sent you! He wants me to stop seeing his daughter, right? Well, you can tell Mr. Stoner that Betty doesn't really mean a thing to me. I only felt sorry for her because she's near-sighted and flat-chested. Besides, no other girl I ever asked would give me a date."

The pace the two men were setting remained the same and the expression on their faces didn't change.

"Then it must be my cousin Andy who concocted this scheme. He wants to inherit our grandfather's entire estate." Joey laughed. "If so, please inform Andy he's more than welcome to my share. I just spoke to grandpa at the hospital and the only thing he's leaving us is a pile of unpaid bills."

The march continued up the next street. Again Joey laughed.

"Okay, I've got it! It's Sam Donaldson at the office who hired you fellows in order to get the promotion himself. Ha, ha! The joke's on Sam. I heard

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in the washroom yesterday that our boss is slipping some whippersnapper nephew of his into that new job. Poor Sam! I don't mind personally. After all, I've been waiting twenty years for a promotion, but Sam—he still imagines he'll get somewhere with that firm."

They turned into an alley, ducked under some clotheslines, and came out on the avenue. Joey's brow wrinkled.

"Or can it be Herb Waters who's behind this? He gave me an I.O.U. for twenty-two bucks after our poker game Saturday night. But I've lost that darn I.O.U. of his, probably threw it out with the trash. I'm always losing things, so maybe that's another reason I can never get out from behind the eight ball."

The men's faces were graven images. It was impossible to tell what they were thinking.

A long black limousine stood at the curb. Joey felt himself being propelled toward it.

"Of course, it could also be that crabby landlady of mine who's always complaining I play my TV too loud and even begrudges me using a hot plate in my room. Well, she'd be interested to know that my big picture tube has blown out and it'll be at least three months before I can afford to buy another one. Boy, oh, boy, if I could only move out of that dump!"

One of the men opened the rear door of the car and the other shoved Joey inside.

"Wait, I know! It's Gebhart the butcher. I swear by everything holy that I'll settle my account, I'll pay him the twenty-eight dollars I owe him or my name's not Joseph Devlin!"

The men drew back. "You mean you're not Harold R. Brooks?"

Joey shook his head.

They pushed him away and climbed into the car. In a second the motor sprang to life.

"Does this mean you're not going to take me for a ride, not going to kill me?" asked Joey.

"Sorry, we thought you were somebody else," said the man now behind the wheel.

"Brother, we'd probably be doing you a favor if we did, with all that hard luck you've been having," said his companion.

The limousine glided out into traffic and Joey stood there looking after it until other cars blocked it from view. When he resumed walking he felt somewhat disappointed.

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a *NEW* Ganelon story by

JAMES POWELL

Visit once again the tiny principality of San Sebastiano, back in 1871, and join the great Ganelon, the Surete's master of ratiocination . . . Perhaps these tales of San Sebastiano are not everyone's cup of tea. If so, 'tis a pity. Perhaps they call for an acquired taste. If so, we ask that you give yourself, freely and willingly, to this newest tale and let it work its magic. If you do this, we think you'll enjoy James Powell's charm and subtlety and sly humor and slyly irrelevant detail—to say nothing of his clever plot almost (repeat, almost) hidden in the deceptive simplicity.

Yes, dear reader, we ask you to peek into Ganelon's Sherlockian mind and follow the Master Detective's involuted and convoluted deductions . . . "Amazing, my dear Ambrose!"

GANELON AND THE MASTER THIEF

by JAMES POWELL

One warm Mediterranean evening in 1871 two men turned from the gaslight of San Sebastiano's Boulevard des Banlieux and into the dark shadows of the rue Bazajet. The heavy-jowled, slouch-hatted one with the short quick step was Ambrose Ganelon, founder of the little principality's celebrated detective agency. His tall companion, who had a fine red mustache and a bouncy walk—which even among policemen has never been associated with great intelligence—was Inspector Flanel of the San Sebastiano Sûreté. Several years before, Ganelon (or, to quote the citation more exactly, Ganelon's "faculty of ratiocination") had been named a Treasure of the Principality, First Class. Since then, by law, a police bodyguard accompanied him everywhere.

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It was an easy burden for the police. Even when his wife was alive, Ganelon seldom strayed from his armchair and slippers. Agency legwork fell to the tidy, intimidated little men who lined the wooden bench in the detective's hallway until summoned by an impatient bell. Wiping his palms on his knees, the one nearest the door would hurry into the great man's presence, never knowing if he was to be sent around the corner for cigars or around the world in some case involving the evil hand of Ganelon's archenemy, the subtle Dr. Ludwig Fong.

But attached to his armchair though he was, Ganelon never missed a meeting of the Cercle Louis Fragonard which gathered on the late musician's birthday to honor the composer of the principality's national anthem: *The Cabbage and the Rose Entwined, San Sebastiano, Joy to Humankind.*

This year when the toasts had been made and the speeches spoken and Ganelon was taking his leave, it came to him that Death, of late, had imposed a heavy tax on the composer's friends and admirers. As the world stood on the threshold of the age of the saxophone, Fragonard, alas, had written almost exclusively for the oboe. Seized by a sudden fit of melancholy, Ganelon dismissed his carriage and elected to walk home in the hope that the beauty of the night would raise his spirits.

At first Inspector Flanel had followed as unobtrusively as Sergeant Lucas, Ganelon's regular bodyguard. But when the great detective turned off onto the side streets, Flanel had become a bustle of officiousness. A footfall in the darkness behind them, a flutter at a window across the street, a suspicious shape in a doorway ahead, and Flanel, hand on pistol, stepped in to shield his charge from danger.

For his part Ganelon obstinately chose the blackest and narrowest turnings until at last they found themselves in the rue Maquereau, a long crooked flight of stone steps that staggered down to a particularly vicious underworld quarter whose name the English-language Baedeker mercifully translated as "The Devil's Slop Bucket."

Suddenly Flanel stiffened and dug his fingers into Ganelon's forearm. From up ahead came the sound of heavy footsteps. The slowness of the pace signaled menace. Step. A fearless sound. Step. The jungle predator. Step. Hunting its victim.

Flanel placed himself square-

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ly in front of Ganelon. The dark figure of a man turned the corner. Big, neckless, all shoulders and biceps, he seemed to fill the street. Flanel stepped back, unceremoniously pushing Ganelon against a brick wall. The big man stopped. The gaslit rear entrance of the Dumas Bottling Works lay between them. The big man waited. Still in the shadows, he cupped his hands around a match to light a cigarette, revealing for an instant a scarred and broken face. Then he folded his mighty arms and stood there, as though daring them to cross the patch of light and join him in the shadows.

Flanel drew his pistol. At just that moment from out of the darkness at the man's feet trotted a small black and white dog, sniffing leisurely at the cobbles. Flanel exhaled audibly and stuffed the pistol back on his hip. A man walking his dog. Only that. Ganelon and Flanel passed on, the threat of the big man and the dark street canceled by the little animal.

Yet as Ganelon brushed the brick dust from his hat and turned away from the Devil's Slop Bucket, he couldn't help remarking, "Apparently Inspector Flanel doesn't think assassins can own puppy dogs or bombs can be hidden in bouquets of flowers."

At first the policeman made no reply. But after a bit he caressed his mustache with his index knuckle and said, "Invariably it's frills like little dogs that bring the assassin to bay. Suppose, in spite of my valiant efforts to take the bullet myself, that fellow had shot you and escaped. There you are, fatally wounded at my feet."

Flanel discussed Ganelon's agonizing and drawn-out death throes with such relish that the great detective had to wave him on impatiently.

"All right," said Flanel, "looking up I see the little dog emerging from some hiding place where it had darted in fright at the gunshot. I call him to me gently. He comes. I have a way with animals, you see. Together we go to all the places frequented by the enemies of Ambrose Ganelon. At, let us say, that café in the Place des Sphinx, the one that sells prawns, the little dog strains at the leash and barks. In the corner a glass slips from someone's startled fingers. I release the dog and it bounds, yapping with delight, to greet its master. The man recognizes me—'It's Flanel of the Sûreté!'—and the panic on his face turns to resignation. Sadly he bends over to welcome his little friend, his unwitting betrayer."

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Flanel's voice was furry with emotion.

"Bravo, Flanel," said Ganelon sourly and hunched his shoulders to indicate a desire to return to his own thoughts.

"It's really not that far-fetched," insisted Flanel. Glancing at Ganelon out of the corner of his eye he added with studied casualness, "In fact, I'm working on a case right now where the means used by the culprit to lull suspicion will shortly deliver him up to me."

Ganelon hunched his shoulders higher.

"I can see you are intrigued," said Flanel eagerly, "so let me sketch in the situation. It involves a series of hotel thefts. In each case the thief was seen either entering or leaving the victim's room. You see, our thief makes his comings and goings appear innocent by whistling. The thefts began on Monday. While the victim and his wife were taking the health-giving waters of our Fountain Balbec—he, like so many of us, is troubled by a liver disorder—a set of ruby studs and cuff links valued at one thousand francs was stolen from their room. The thief, dressed as a valet, was seen leaving the room by another hotel guest, a Madame Scapini, the widow of an Italian general. He bowed to her and strode off whistling a quick march." Flanel raised a finger significantly.

"The following day, Tuesday," he continued, "a brooch of star sapphires worth two thousand francs was stolen after the victims and their children had gone to see the circus clowns. A chambermaid noticed an elegantly dressed man in a full beard coming out of their room. He was whistling a march and"—Flanel raised his finger again—"walked away in time to the music.

"Then on Thursday morning, while victims number three were boating on the Cornichon, their room was robbed of a diamond choker valued at five thousand francs. A neighbor across the hall was taking a late breakfast in bed and heard the whistler approach. After a few moments he heard the door open and close. Five minutes later the whistler left. Again he was whistling a march.

"From all this I believe we may conclude that the thief is an army veteran, perhaps recently discharged. And in this regard we are checking into the records. At the same time I have assigned policeman Gunter, who once held the rank of sergeant-major in our Tripolitanian Legion, to the hotel lobby. Gunter sneaks up behind anyone taking an interest in the

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guests' comings and goings and shouts a military command. If they snap to attention he takes them in for questioning." Flanel cleared his throat. "So far I must admit all we've come up with is a German postman on vacation."

They had reached the Place General Janvier, named after the principality's great cavalry commander who had distinguished himself against the French at the Battle of Borodino. Perhaps Ganelon was thinking about Napoleon's subsequent retreat from Moscow, for though the night was warm he drew his coat around him as if against the cold. Then, abruptly, he turned into a narrow side street lined with shuttered shop fronts.

Flanel followed patiently for several blocks. "Of course it's all too trivial to interest you," he said at last. "And yet the thefts are not without certain curious elements. The fact that the thief's appetite seems to have increased with each theft, for example." Flanel forced a laugh. "Next time he may try for something big, really big."

Ganelon stared straight ahead. "Like the Eye of the Snowstorm?" he asked.

Flanel was stroking his mustache. His jaw dropped. "Come to think of it, the Sayyid of Mokador *is* in town," he said, recovering quickly. "Just suppose our whistler is working up to the theft of that immense pearl the Sayyid wears in his turban. What a chance for you! I can see the headlines now: 'Ganelon Solves Theft of the Eye of the Snowstorm Even Before Priceless Pearl Is Stolen. The Master Detective—' "

"Flanel, Flanel," sighed Ganelon. "Enough of this foolishness."

"I don't understand," said Flanel innocently.

"The Eye of the Snowstorm has already been stolen," said Ganelon.

Flanel looked down at the cobblestones. "Whatever gave you that idea?" he said half-heartedly.

Ganelon cocked a bushy eyebrow at the policeman. "Do you recall that last year our principality was plagued by a rash of hotel thefts?" he said, and then added, "In spite of all the efforts of Inspector Flanel into whose province such matters fall."

"Who but you would have suspected a gang of Serbian midgets disguised as chimney sweeps?" muttered Flanel.

"Nevertheless," continued Ganelon, "this year the Hotel Miramar, alone among all the hotels, took special security precautions, including the installation of expensive locks of

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a new and radical design. 'At the Miramar your room is your strongbox,' I believe their promotional literature said."

"Dr. Lubke's Patented Wunderbar," said Flanel. "An admirable lock. In fact, the principality has just installed Wunderbars in all our public buildings."

"Until this evening I certainly believed the Wunderbar to be without peer," said Ganelon. "The newspapers report thefts at this hotel or at that, but never at the Miramar. Now you tell me of a series of thefts that were not reported in the newspapers, thefts at a hotel which you do not name, one where the guests leave their valuables lying about openly in their rooms. I deduce that the hotel is the Miramar which, to protect its reputation, has quietly come to some settlement with the first three victims.

"Then coincidentally I learn from my morning newspaper that the Sayyid of Mokador has arrived in San Sebastiano and, as usual, is staying at the Miramar. This evening's newspaper tells me that the Sayyid, a notoriously punctilious man, has postponed his ceremonial visit and exchange of courtesies with our beloved Prince Conrad. Last but not least, Sergeant Lucas, who has the stomach of a billygoat, comes down with a bout of indigestion at dinner and in his place as bodyguard I am given Inspector Flanel who specializes in investigating hotel thefts. I conclude that the Eye of the Snowstorm has been stolen."

"All right," admitted Flanel abruptly. "The Sayyid's given us twenty-four hours to recover it. Then he'll break the story to the newspapers and call on the services of the great Ambrose Ganelon. The honor of the principality is at stake."

"The honor of the police force, you mean," said Ganelon. "You expect me to solve the case so that I won't be called in on it, correct? How I dislike affairs of honor. Especially when they wind up costing me a substantial fee. But let's get on with it. Wunderbar or not, surely the pearl wasn't left in a hotel room unguarded?"

"Not exactly," said Flanel. "As you know, when abroad the Sayyid maintains his Mokador schedule religiously. At home he naps after lunch until the sun stands above the Sacred Minaret, an event marked by the firing of a cannon from the wall of Fort Sulieman the Cruel. While in San Sebastiano the flagpole atop the Ministry of the Marine serves as the Minaret and the Sayyid's trusty

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Mameluke simulates the cannon by firing his ancient matchlock out the hotel window.

"This afternoon the Mameluke, on guard in the hall in front of his master's door, his terrible scimitar at the ready, entered the suite to fire off the gun and discovered to his dismay that his cannister of gunpowder was mysteriously empty. Knowing that any departure from the schedule could cost him his head, he dashed off to obtain a fresh supply, locking the door behind him.

"Unfortunately the Mameluke speaks nothing but Arabic. The poor girl behind the counter of that little shop around the corner interpreted his attempts to pantomime an explosion as a fierce declaration of love, and when he finally leaped over the counter to serve himself, she fled screaming into the street. The Mameluke rushed back just in time to fire off the matchlock. The Sayyid awoke, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, and discovered his faithful retainer struggling with three policemen who had pursued him into the hotel. Reaching for his turban he found its gold case ajar and the Eye of the Snowstorm missing."

"And was the whistler in evidence?" asked Ganelon.

Flanel nodded. "But not at the time of the robbery. He was seen entering the suite in the morning while the Sayyid and his party were attending a welcoming ceremony on the City Hall steps." Flanel's finger shot up. "Once again he was whistling a march."

The great detective shook his head. "I'm afraid that isn't much of a clue to the culprit's identity, considering the variety of civilian events that society flavors with martial airs," said Ganelon. "Perhaps he had just come from a wedding or a funeral or a coronation or a bullfight. And who can whistle a march and not keep in step to it? However, the whistling does explain one thing: how our thief knew a particular room at the Miramar was unoccupied.

"I suggest that he familiarized himself with the guests and their rooms, perhaps even living at the hotel himself until he was prepared to act. Then he simply enjoyed the many pleasures of our little principality and took things as they came. On Monday, for example, he went to the Fountain Balbec. Perhaps to take the waters. More likely to hear the music from the bandshell. Recognizing guests from the Miramar, he knew their room to be unoccupied. So he paid it a visit. Is it so strange that a man coming from

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a band concert should be whistling a march?"

"No thief would operate in so hit-or-miss a fashion," Flanel dared to object.

"We will get back to that," said Ganelon, "since it involves another interesting point in this case. But meanwhile let us continue to follow our whistler. On Tuesday, while attending the circus, he recognizes more people who are stopping at the Miramar. He returns to the hotel whistling, quite naturally, a stirring circus march." Ganelon drew out his cigar case and stopped beneath the broken windows of the abandoned Asylum for the Blind.

"But of course, of course," said Flanel, pounding his forehead theatrically. "Why didn't I think of that? Wednesday he takes the day off. Then on Thursday, while out boating, he meets more Miramar people barging down the Cornichon with Cleopatra and her royal musicians."

"That may be closer to the truth than you think," said Ganelon, snipping the end from his Java Flower. "Let us go back to Wednesday. Our thief continues his pleasure-seeking, so Wednesday evening he naturally goes to the opera."

"Naturally," mocked Flanel.

"He looks for a guest of the Miramar wearing a substantial piece of jewelry." said Ganelon. "He sees the diamond choker and, by the purest accident, also overhears the plans for the boat trip on the Cornichon." Ganelon lit his cigar and then held the match up to one of the posters that cluttered the asylum wall. "I see that the new opera, *Aida*, was scheduled for last Wednesday. I find the Grand March impressive in an Italian sort of way. Hail the Conquering Hero! Just as this morning at the City Hall it was 'Hail the Visiting Sayyid' with music supplied by the fifes and drums of the Brotherhood of Street Sweepers' band."

They crossed the Old Canal by an iron footbridge and found themselves in the Place Zanzibar. There, by the light of pitch torches, porters and Arab merchants were emptying the warehouses of their precious cargoes of dried roots, berries, rinds, leaves, and buds from the four corners of the world and setting up the stalls for the early-morning spice market.

Beneath the warehouse eaves were small windows crowded with young men in shirt-sleeves who read by torchlight or strummed guitars or rode the sills as if they were horses, shouting and bantering from window to window, from building to building. The noise was as much a part of the Place

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Zanzibar as the heavy odors of the spice market itself. For as long as anyone could remember, each warehouse had been renting out the rooms beneath its eaves to the students of a particular university faculty. Years later a good healthy sneeze could bring a moist and far-away look to many a judge's or lawyer's eye as they remembered their days as a "Cayenne" when the battle cry "Geshundheit" would bring law students boiling up out of the basement bistros and down from the attics and into the fray.

Today the square of the Place Zanzibar was a fashionable late-night gathering place. Ganelon chose a table in a sidewalk café crowded with theatregoers and insomniacs. He sat staring up moodily at one particular window beneath the eaves of the establishment of Akmed Fuad et Fils, cinnamon merchants, where a forlorn young man with wild hair was chewing on the end of a wooden pen-holder and staring out across the rooftops. Flanel strummed his fingers until the waiter brought their drinks: a brandy for him, Eau Le Mans mineral water in a bottle with a colorful Corsican bandit on the label for Ganelon. "You suddenly seem reluctant to help us," said Flanel.

"Did you know I was once a Cinnamon?" asked Ganelon.

Flanel snorted. "You were a theology student?"

"It was a long time ago," said Ganelon. "The winter of '29, the White Winter as those who remember still call it because the snow came and stayed. There were four of us, each renting a corner of that room up there: Martin, a cadaverous and totally humorless young man who was trying to survive by translating German revolutionary tracts for the Anarchist League at ten sous a page; Rataud, who spent all his time in bed fully dressed with his blanket drawn up under his chin watching his frosty breath rise; and then, of course, there was Jules. He had dropped out of school after receiving the prize in homiletics and had become a locksmith's apprentice. 'I decided that one foolproof lock would do more to prevent thefts than a thousand beautiful sermons,' he once told us.

"As for myself, I had been cast into a deep depression by my failure to support myself and my studies by writing music criticism for the *Factotum du Matin*, a mood sharpened by the winter and the poor condition of my shoes. With the first snow I ventured out into the streets, stuffing my

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soles with some first drafts of Martin's anarchist translations. It was a careless act, considering the reactionary mood of the times. As it happened, I fell in with two of Baron du Thon's jackals who left no doubt in my mind how the Prime Minister had received his nickname, The Pocket Metternich. They swore they were going to search me but I escaped through the snow. Knowing they would be looking for me, I had to keep to my room. Of such things, among others, armchair detectives are made.

"It was Jules who got us through the winter. He shared his macaroni and the charcoal fire he used to limber his fingers so he could tinker with his locks. He tolerated my sullen moods, nodded pleasantly at Martin's revolutionary epigrams—'Crime is an iceberg and the small part that shows above water we call the police'—and warmed Rataud with reminiscences of a minor eruption of Vesuvius which he witnessed as a boy on a visit to Naples with an uncle.

"In my confinement I developed a morbid interest in newspaper accounts of crimes in the principality, telling myself that a theology student should understand the workings of the criminal mind. But before long I was railing against the low caliber of the underworld imagination. From there it was a short step to planning 'perfect crimes' to confound Monsieur Medocq, that overrated informer-turned-founder-of-our-police-department.

"Jules alone understood that all this had become more than an intellectual exercise for me. 'My dear Ambrose,' he said, 'I wouldn't like to see you take up a trade which will soon have no future. One of these days I will invent my perfect lock, one that not even the inventor can open without a key. And then where will you be? Turn your talents in their proper direction. Doesn't Medocq pay for information?'

"Intrigued by the thought of extracting money from Medocq for conclusions reached simply from my reading of the morning paper, I decided to give it a try. By spring I had abandoned my theological studies altogether and had left the cinnamon warehouse for modest lodgings elsewhere. I never saw Martin or Rataud again. Poor Martin was to perish several years later in the multiple explosion which occurred when a bomb he intended for the Minister of Justice landed by mistake in a bomb-laden carriage filled with brother anarchists. I understand Rataud is a missionary bishop

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somewhere in the Tropics.

"The Jules I ran into on the street six years later had grown thinner and much paler. His eyes squinted against the afternoon sun as he refused my invitation to stop for a drink. 'Terrible of me, I know,' he said nervously, 'but I must get back to my work. I'm close, so very close.' He told me that he had been reading about me in the newspapers. 'Some day,' he assured me with complete confidence, 'we will both receive the Prix d'Or of the Academy—you as the great detective, I as the inventor of the perfect lock.' We parted company and I never saw him again, though I understand that ten years later he left San Sebastiano and went into another line of work. Jules Grasset."

Flanel's attention had wandered to the next table where three elegant women were chatting in drawling English with their escorts, a courtly, white-haired gentleman whom they addressed as "General" and an erect and younger man with an empty coat sleeve. "Jules Grasset," repeated Flanel absently. Then he exclaimed, "Ah, no. No! During his entire career as a jewel thief Grasset never comitted a robbery in San Sebastiano. Not one."

"Assuming the Wunderbar is all you say it is, who else could open it in a matter of seconds without a key?" demanded Ganelon.

Flanel waved the question away. "Grasset has retired a wealthy man and is living in Lausanne," he said. "There's a story going round that the Wunderbar was the main reason for his retiring. Be that as it may, he doesn't need the money."

"But we are dealing precisely with a thief who doesn't need money," said Ganelon. "A thief who can be quite nonchalant in his choice of victims, who chooses to steal trinkets when there is much more for the taking."

"The Eye of the Snowstorm is hardly a trinket," insisted Flanel.

Ganelon threw up his hands. "Try turning it into cold cash. At least large gem stones can be cut down. But what can one do with an immense pearl? Hide it away for a few years? Perhaps, but unlike a diamond, pearls are not forever. They grow old like you or me and lose their value bit by bit over the years. A thief who needed money and could open any door in the Miramar would hardly bother with the Eye of the Snowstorm."

"All right," said Flanel, "you're the great detective.

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Suppose it is your friend Grasset, how do we nab him and recover the pearl?"

Ganelon called for a pen and paper and scrawled a quick note which he handed to Flanel. "Ask the editor of the *Factotum du Matin* to run this as a favor to me. You may be sure that Grasset will be reading the newspapers tomorrow morning."

" 'Among the new arrivals expected at the Hotel Miramar by the afternoon train,' " Flanel read aloud, " 'is Dr. Ernst Lubke, inventor of the celebrated Wunderbar lock which has baffled thieves and burglars on three continents. This evening he will be guest of honor at the weekly meeting of the Royal Academy of San Sebastiano which is expected later this month to award him its coveted Prix d'Or.' " Flanel shrugged. "I don't understand this," he said as he rose. Then he leaned over, preened his mustache and added with mock compassion, "But nevertheless I can appreciate how very difficult it is for you, betraying an old companion and benefactor."

Flanel hurried away through the spice stalls, leaving Ganelon, Treasure First Class of the Principality, alone and unprotected. Ganelon watched him go. Yes, he would make Flanel pay for that last remark. Ganelon brooded for a few moments on his own vindictiveness. Then he decided to brush up on his English by eavesdropping on the languid accents of the next table where the conversation was centering around an eventful bygone cotillion.

Though it was early in the evening the hotel room was dark. Before he left, Flanel had closed the shutters and drawn the curtains. Ganelon sat facing the door, the lamp unlit on the table before him. Just a few minutes ago, he knew, the members of the Royal Academy in their cocked hats and ceremonial uniforms would have dottered out into the courtyard of the Palais des Sciences and as the band of the Prince's Scot Horseguard struck up *The Cabbage and the Rose Entwined* and San Sebastiano's bicolored flag was lowered, the Academicians would unsheath their swords and point them skyward, re-enacting the anthem couplet:

"The sunset glinting on our
wise old blades
Shall daunt the nighttime's
cannonades."

Popular with the tourists though the ceremony was, it

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had caused Ganelon to decline three nominations to the Academy. The thought of all that cold steel in all those palsied hands always sent a chill up his spine. Invariably, when the Academicians and their guests filed back into the palace, the cobblestones were littered with severed plumes and epaulettes.

Grasset could not fail to see Flanel-Lubke follow the old men inside. Ganelon had insisted that the police inspector wear a loud plaid suit and a hound's-tooth cape heavy with frogging. Flanel had fretted but complied. Then Ganelon added, as if it were an afterthought, "And, of course, Lubke is clean-shaven." Pale and trembling, Flanel had shouted, "Ah, no!" and stormed out, protecting his mustache with his hand. But he had returned later, his upper lip bare, leaving Ganelon to wonder what threats his superiors had made.

Whistling and steps in the hall. The tune was, as Ganelon had expected, Fragonard's *The Cabbage and the Rose Entwined*. A pick scraped gently in the lock and the door swung open. Light from the hall fell across the table and the detective waiting alone. "Come in, Jules," said Ganelon.

"So it was you after all, Ambrose, my friend," said Grasset, stepping inside and closing the door. Ganelon struck a match. Lamplight revealed a Jules Grasset thinner than in their Cinnamon days but more relaxed and urbane than at their last meeting. When he had shaken Ganelon's hand and sat down, Grasset smiled, "Of course it was all too neat. But that business of Lubke winning the Prix d'Or made me throw caution to the wind."

Ganelon shrugged apologetically and filled two silver cups with cognac from a silver flask, the gift of some Prince of Wales. "You've brought the pearl?"

Grasset drew the Eye of the Snowstorm from his pocket and set it on the table between them. He sighed regretfully. "I'd have given a lot to see Lubke's face when the police, acting on an anonymous tip, discovered the celebrated pearl in his locked hotel room. Lubke would have had to admit the fallibility of his precious Wunderbar or find himself behind bars. Could he have kept *that* out of the newspapers, do you think?"

They both stared deeply into the pearl. Finally Ganelon said, "Why?"

"At the end of one's life one should be left with one's honor," said Grasset quietly. "Lubke was spreading stories

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that his Wunderbar had driven Grasset into retirement. Grasset has people whose esteem he cherishes. So he was obliged to take up his craft for one final demonstration of his skill. But when the Miramar conspired to keep his successes from the newspapers he was obliged to steal the famous pearl. Even there they—"

"I know all that," said Ganelon. "I meant why did you give up trying to invent the perfect lock?"

"What can I say?" said Grasset. "Remember the alchemists? They spent lifetimes deciphering gibberish from rotting books and muttering over their alembics all in the search for the Philosophers' Stone which would turn base metal into gold or the Universal Solvent which would dissolve all other substances. I saw myself becoming old that way, crabbed, stooped, alone, my single-mindedness turned to eccentricity. The more I learned about making locks, the easier they became to open. My life was slipping away in a race with myself. So I stopped running.

"But try as I might, I could never shake off certain feelings of guilt for having abandoned my quest for the perfect lock. To prove that no one else had succeeded where I had failed, I found I had to keep opening locks and I chose those of the rich, reasoning that theirs would be the most up-to-date. My early thefts—remember how our poor friend Martin called the jewels of the rich 'the crystalized blood, sweat, and tears of the poor'?—were intended more as a comment on the poor quality of the locks. But of course I soon acquired a certain taste for high living. The rest I think you know."

Grasset looked at the detective. "Well, what now? You have the pearl." He rose as if to leave.

Ganelon shook his head. "These affairs of honor," he muttered distastefully. "When the Great Detective and the Great Thief meet it has to be more than a draw. I'm afraid you must wait for Flanel."

Grasset sat down again. "I understand perfectly," he said.

The next morning an event took place for which the rue Blondin had no precedent. Ganelon left his residence for the third day in a row.

Scowling, with Sergeant Lucas, his regular bodyguard, at his side, he was carried off in a carriage with a crested door to the official exchange of greetings between the Sayyid of Mokador and Prince Conrad at the Summer Palace. Prince Conrad had insisted that Gan-

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elon accept the grateful Sayyid's invitation.

"A small price to pay, my dear Ambrose," the Prince had written in his regal if somewhat childish hand, "for the friendship of the Sayyid of Mokador."

Ganelon snorted to himself and watched the houses roll by. He was still scowling as they crossed the Pont de Ventre and Lucas said, "Did you hear, maître, that Jules Grasset escaped from Duranceville Prison just before dawn? I hear there's hell to pay. He passed through sixteen locks to do it. And apart from the one on the guard captain's new Hamilton Whirligig bicycle, they were all those new Wunderbars they installed last month."

Ganelon was smiling broadly. "Lucas," he said, "back in the Middle Ages the alchemists spent their lives hunting down the Universal Solvent, a substance that could dissolve all others." He tapped Lucas on the knee with his finger. "But suppose they *had* found it. Tell me then: what they would have kept it in?"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 372nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Every time a publishable "first story" reaches our desk we are amazed and impressed all over again—not only at the considerable talent of the writers whose work has not yet appeared in print, but also at the variety and diversity of "first stories," at the tremendous differences in style, plot, and creative attitude. It's a recurring dream-come-true and Mary Braund's "first story" repeats the dream; and adds a little-something-extra—a glimpse for American readers of the delights of British TV fare (and so far as we know, the telly of England has never been called a "wasteland") . . .

The author, Mary Braund, is English and her husband, a surgeon, is also English. They have three children. The family came to the United States four years ago (as of the time of this writing), settled in Seattle, Washington, expecting to stay only one year; but they liked it so much they've decided to settle in America for good . . .

WHAT'S ON THE TELLY TONIGHT?

by MARY BRAUND

Aggie Williams was a witch. At any rate, Uncle Charlie thought so and he ought to know—he had to live with her. He sat by the grate stirring the few incombustible pieces of coal with the black iron poker and wished he could bash Aggie over the head with it. Maybe not actually bring it down on that stringy gray hair, but just wave the poker around in the air a bit, threatening like, so that she would cringe and beg for mercy.

Aha! That was the stuff! Show her that he was a man after all, even if he *had* to live in her crummy little house because his only choice was between that and the workhouse. Not that they called it

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the workhouse any more, of course. Too mealy-mouthed these days to call anything by its proper name. But he knew what a workhouse was all right, no matter if it was fancied up with names like "Retirement Home for the Elderly."

Though there were days when he wondered if he might not be a sight better off there than in this miserable hole, having to put up with Aggie and her stinking cooking. Why her mother had never taught her to do anything with food except fry it—but then, no one could teach Aggie Williams anything. He liked a nice plate of chips as well as the next man, but there were limits to a man's endurance—and to his stomach, as well. His stomach wasn't feeling too good these days—it had that great lump sitting inside most of the time, and soda bicarbonate hardly eased the pain these days.

Uncle Charlie jabbed viciously at the smoldering fire.

The food in the workhouse really couldn't be any worse than Aggie's. But then that old battleaxe down at the insurance place had told him, "There just isn't any room in the Old Peoples' Home, Mr. James, and after all, you are very nicely situated with your niece, aren't you? You are really very lucky, Mr. James, to have someone in the family willing and able to look after you. There are far too many old people nowadays, Mr. James, who have no one, just no one at all, to take care of them. Think yourself lucky, Mr. James, that you have a roof over your head and your meals cooked for you."

Uncle Charlie spat into the fire.

All right for her, the old bag, she didn't have to sit and look at Aggie's fat white face every day. Or eat her greasy, indigestible food either. What he'd do if Aggie didn't go out to work most nights, he couldn't imagine. Slaving, Aggie called it. Peace and quiet, that's what he called it.

Crash with the poker on the hard coals again.

She did all right out of him anyway. Handed over most of his pension to her, he did, just kept a few shillings for his packs of Woodbines and a drop of beer down at the Lion when he could make it, and that was getting more and more difficult these days with his rheumatics. What with his rheumatics and his stomach, life was hardly worth living any more.

Still, there was always television. Thank God for the telly! Once Aggie went off to work at six o'clock, he could pull up the old chair and settle himself down for a nice quiet

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evening's viewing. Of course, half the stuff wasn't worth watching, but if there was nothing good on one channel there was always hope for better on another. Yes, the telly saved his life all right.

He heard the front door slam. Oh, oh! There she was, back from her afternoon at the Bingo. Maybe today she had won something—that might brighten things up a bit. If ever she won the jackpot they might get steak for supper. Even then it would be fried, of course.

Aggie Williams clumped her way into the little back room.

There he was, the old slob, hunched in front of the fire as usual. Why couldn't men find something useful to do with themselves all day long instead of expecting you to wait on them hand, foot, and finger? There'd be dirty dishes in the sink, left over from dinner, and it wouldn't have even occurred to the lazy old buzzard to wash them up.

Oh, no, just sit there in front of the fire, waiting for her to come in and get his tea, and then complain because it wasn't what his lordship liked. Men! Dirty layabouts, that's what they were.

Well, she'd shape things up a bit round here now that she'd got this new job. No more hogging the television to himself in the evenings, she'd see to that.

"Win anything, Aggie?" Uncle Charlie asked, grinning at her hopefully.

Look at that filthy shirt! She had to drag the clothes off his back before she could get them down to the launderette. Dirty old pigs, that's what men were.

"Not a sausage," she said, thumping her shopping bag on the table. "That Mrs. Green from Spring Street, she won twenty pounds. Twenty pounds, imagine."

Their two pairs of eyes gleamed avariciously at the thought.

"You know what she'll do with it, don't you? Spend it all down at the boozer, if I know her, and them kids running around with their toes sticking out of their shoes. Wasters, that's what some people are, never putting a thing aside for when they might need it."

Uncle Charlie got the message. Boozers and wasters. He flourished the poker secretly.

"What you got for tea then, Aggie?"

"Nice bit of plaice." She sighed heavily. "I suppose I'll have to go and start the chips."

Uncle Charlie's stomach groaned.

There was a strong smell of frying fat and fish when she

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dumped the plates, knives, and forks on the table. You'd think it would strike him once in a while that he could set the table. She pushed an old pair of his socks to one side, placed a teacup back on its saucer, and brushed a sprinkling of biscuit crumbs onto the floor. When the food was ready she took the evening paper from her shopping bag and they ate in their customary silence. Uncle Charlie scraped the flesh off the gray spotted skin and picked a few bones out of his mouth. As soon as he was finished he went out to the scullery for the soda bicarbonate.

The marble clock on the mantelpiece said 5:45. Soon time to switch on the news.

"Hadn't you better be moving, Aggie?" She was deep in the paper. "Don't want to be late, you know."

"Just looking to see what's on the telly tonight," she answered, without looking up. "There are one or two things I fancy."

Uncle Charlie shifted uneasily on his rheumaticky hip.

"Not working tonight, or something?" he asked anxiously.

Aggie folded the paper deliberately.

"You're not sick are you, Aggie? Or got laid off or anything?"

"Didn't I tell you?" Aggie's surprise was manifestly false. "There was a vacancy on the morning shift. I got it. I won't have to go off to work nights any more, Uncle Charlie. I'll be able to sit and watch the telly with you every evening."

Uncle Charlie choked on his soda bicarbonate.

"There's lots of things I want to see," Aggie went on. "Like this program about antiques at seven. Yes, I think I'll watch that. Some people say it's very good."

"Antiques?" Uncle Charlie howled. Seven o'clock was when he watched *Coronation Street*. "What do *you* know about antiques?"

"There's a lot I'd like to know," said Aggie firmly. "We'll watch it."

His evening ruined, Uncle Charlie left for the Lion at 6:45. But that didn't turn out any better; he had only enough money for half a pint, and though he made it last as long as he could, it wasn't quite 8:30 when he got back to the house.

There was Aggie, her feet up on the pouffe, a cup of tea by her side, a cigarette dangling from her mouth, enjoying some program about starving children in Africa. He ached to switch over to the special about George Best that he had been looking forward to all week.

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He sat glumly in the hard brown chair with the wooden arms. Aggie had even taken his comfortable seat. He watched scenes of emaciated children, thatched huts, and pouring rain. That was followed by an earnest discussion between some interviewer and several worried-looking geysers from the Red Cross or something. It was all very sad and it made Uncle Charlie's indigestion much worse.

"You're not really liking this, are you, Aggie?"

"It's not a matter of liking," she said, without taking her eyes from the screen. "It's good for us to know what's going on in the other half of the world. Makes us feel happier with our own lot, don't you think?"

Uncle Charlie grunted. "Any tea left in the pot?" he asked pathetically.

"I made this in the cup. Wouldn't have thought you'd need any after swigging beer all evening."

Uncle Charlie sucked his teeth for a few minutes. "What time is this over?"

Aggie picked up the paper, held it at arm's length, and perused the TV programs. "Well, there's the news next and then there's *Play of the Week*. After that there's *Twenty-Four Hours*, and then there's some concert. I like a bit of serious music now and then."

"You're going to watch all them things?" Uncle Charlie sank to the depths of depression. He cleared his throat tentatively. "There's a special about George Best on the I.T.V."

"George Best? Who's he?"

"He's a footballer. Plays for United. Everyone knows George Best."

"A footballer?" Aggie snorted. "Those fellows have got too much money and not enough sense. I'm not watching any program about long-haired footballers."

"How do you know he's got long hair if you don't know him?" Uncle Charlie asked slyly.

"Everyone's got long hair these days. In any case, I'm watching this."

Even the news didn't cheer Uncle Charlie up. It was all about riots and demonstrations and there was a speech by some Minister about the need to work harder to improve productivity—the sort of stuff he'd heard and seen a hundred times. No nice murders or plane crashes or anything like that.

He sat uneasily through the first few minutes of *Play of the Week*. It seemed to be about a family who didn't understand each other. Well, he knew all about that!

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"This isn't very exciting," he said, after making a great effort to keep quiet for several minutes. "Why don't we switch over?"

"I want to watch it," said Aggie sharply. "It's educational and we can all do with a bit of education."

Uncle Charlie took himself off to bed. He lay miserably under the shiny green blanket, listening to the sound of the telly downstairs and thought longingly of his quiet evenings of freedom to turn the knob at will. Then he heard the drone of voices from the play change abruptly to music and laughter and he knew Aggie had switched channels. The old bitch. She had driven him off to bed with her education claptrap, then changed programs as soon as he was out of the way.

He struggled out of bed, wrapped his ancient flannel dressing gown around himself, and crept down the narrow stairs in his bare feet. He tried to sidle in through the door without Aggie hearing him. There she was, cackling her silly head off at some comedian, that fellow with the big mustache. Uncle Charlie liked him, too. The door of the room creaked as he tried to push it a bit wider and Aggie turned round.

"Thought you'd gone to bed," she said, swiveling her black beady eyes between him and the television set.

"I was just going," Uncle Charlie wheedled, "then I heard that show starting and I thought I might watch it, too."

"Well, it's no good," and Aggie heaved her bulk from the chair to turn back to the drama. She settled down again, firmly.

All right, Aggie Williams, thought Uncle Charlie, as he made his way back up the cold stairs. All right, I'll get even with you somehow. Coming in ruining an old man's last vestige of enjoyment, spoiling the only thing left in his life. I'll get even with you somehow.

But how? That was the trouble. In the ensuing weeks Uncle Charlie was made to suffer every night of the week and he couldn't think of a thing to do about it. After all, it *was* Aggie's telly and it *was* her house. He went down to the rental place to see if he could get one of his own. He could sit in the front room and see his own programs and to hell with her, but they wanted six months' rent in advance and he just didn't have that much money.

He and Aggie argued and wrangled, he pleaded and begged for a bit of relief, but it was as if she knew exactly what he wanted to watch and

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deliberately chose something else. It made Uncle Charlie's indigestion even worse.

In fact, it became so bad that he decided to go to see the doctor. He went down one morning to the doctor's office on the main road and sat on one of the hard wooden chairs, staring at the table in the middle of the room on which were scattered ancient copies of *Punch* and signs that told of the dangers of smoking.

The waiting room was full of old people like himself, and he listened to the coughing and spluttering and grumbling and moved his left arm uneasily. There was his rheumatics and the indigestion and now this heaviness that went all the way down from the back of his chest to his left elbow. He couldn't decide which he should tell the doctor about first. Getting old was no joke.

The doctor listened patiently to the story of the greasy food and Aggie, and the Insurance and the Old People's Home. He sighed deeply, and really Uncle Charlie felt quite sorry for him. The poor old doc looked so tired himself and that dingy office of his was enough to depress anyone.

The doctor took out his stethoscope and bent his ear to Uncle Charlie's ribs. He wrapped the faded blue cloth around Uncle Charlie's thin arm and puffed on the little black bulb. He shook his head.

"Blood pressure's up, Mr. James," he said, writing on the small pad in front of him. "I can't be sure, but I think you may have some trouble with your heart. All this discomfort you've been getting—well, I don't think it's your stomach so much as your heart." He scribbled away on the pad. "But I don't want to alarm you before we give you a thorough checkup. You'd better go along to the hospital. We'll get an appointment set up for you in the next few days. In the meantime take things easy and don't let yourself get excited."

"You mean it's not that rotten food I have to eat?" Uncle Charlie was quite put out that Aggie was not to blame.

"I think the food might have something to do with it, but I'm afraid it's to do with getting old, Mr. James. That and maybe the general tension of life."

You can bet the tension of life, Uncle Charlie thought as he made his way back through the rain-drenched, sooty streets. I should have told him about Aggie and the telly. He began to feel triumphant. She was upsetting his heart, that's what she was doing. He should have got a note from the doctor telling her to let him watch

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whatever he wanted to, not to upset him by going on all the time about his clothes and the dishes and his bedroom. Bloody old witch.

He sat in the comfy chair all afternoon waiting for her to come home. He got it all planned out—what he was going to watch this evening. *Softly, Softly* and *The Good Old Days.* He liked a bit of nostalgia now and then. He rustled at the coals with the black poker and grinned to himself. She'd listen to him now all right.

They were eating their supper—kidney pie and chips—in silence as usual, when Uncle Charlie remarked casually, dropping it in between mouthfuls, "Went to the doctor's today. He said there might be something wrong with me ticker."

Aggie poked some chips into her mouth, looking at him without expression.

"Yes," Uncle Charlie went on, "he's getting me an appointment at the hospital, with a specialist. A specialist in hearts, you know."

Aggie scraped the remains of the gravy up with her knife and slid it into her mouth. Her black eyes looked past Uncle Charlie to the television set.

"He says I'm not to get myself excited."

Aggie put her hands on the sides of her plate and snorted. "What do you mean, not get yourself excited? What does he think you do all day? Race horses? Win and lose millions on the stock market? Does he know you just sit in a chair and vegetate?"

She stood up from the table with a grunt and started to walk around it. Uncle Charlie knew she was going to switch on the television.

"He means," said Uncle Charlie, waving his arms around, "he means I'm to have my own way a bit in this house. After all, I pay my way. I'm an old man. I don't see why I can't have a few pleasures in life, too. I can see what *I* want to once in a while. It shouldn't be you all the time and never me."

Now he was on his feet and shouting. Aggie put her hands on her hips and faced him coolly. "Oh, the doctor said all that, did he? All for free on the National Health?"

She switched on the television.

"I want to watch *Softly, Softly,*" bellowed Uncle Charlie. Damn, his indigestion was getting worse.

"*Softly, Softly,*" mimicked Aggie. "Remember what the doctor said. Don't get excited."

"*And* I want to see *The Good Old Days,*" Uncle Charlie roared.

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"The Gay Nineties, eh? Just your style. Well, *I* want to watch something about South Africa. So that's that, see."

Uncle Charlie was convulsed with rage. All his frustrations and anger screamed in him to be released The blood rushed around in his head. He literally frothed at the mouth, spluttering incoherently. He wanted to do something violent, really violent.

His suffused eyes rolled from Aggie to the television set, to the table, to the fireplace—to the poker. The poker! He leaped for it, grasped it firmly in his skinny hand, and started to straighten up, the poker clenched in his fist, half raised above his head.

Then, oh God, the pain in his chest. A great crushing, gripping, overwhelming pain. The poker fell to the floor. Uncle Charlie stood for a moment, his fingers clutching his chest. He managed to gasp, "I'll get you yet, Aggie Williams, I'll get you yet"—and then he, too, fell to the floor.

The funeral was on Saturday. Aggie went, of course, large and somber in her gray coat and black felt hat, and there were a couple of the neighbors who went for the ride in the limousine—"to keep Aggie company." There was a small bunch of lilies inscribed "From Your Devoted Niece," and that was all. It was over very quickly.

Afterward, the neighbors and Aggie had a Guinness and a pasty in the Lion. Alice Smithers from next door suggested, "Come to our house this afternoon, Aggie. You shouldn't be alone, you know. We can watch *Grandstand* by the fire and have a nice chat."

Aggie was very pious. "Thanks all the same," she said, "but I think I'll go home. I've got to get used to being alone, haven't I?"

"Well, at least you've got nothing to blame yourself for, Aggie," said Alice Smithers, draining her glass. "You gave him a good home, you did. You were a real good companion to him. You can rest assured you'll get your reward, Aggie Williams. You'll get your reward."

When she got home Aggie settled herself in the comfy chair, her feet up on the pouffe, cigarettes to hand and a cup of tea by her side. She stirred the fire contentedly. This was the life—a bit of privacy at last.

The familiar face of David Coleman loomed on the screen at 1:45 P.M. "Lots of good things this afternoon," his cheerful voice declared. "Racing from Newmarket, Rugby International between Wales

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and Scotland at the Arms Park, motor cross from Birdlip . . ."

Aggie's head nodded. Only for a moment . . . When she opened her eyes again, the horses were being paraded around the ring before the first race at Newmarket. The camera dwelt lovingly on the shining flanks, the jockeys, the trainers, the owners. It scanned the interested spectators leaning idly on the rails—sheepskin-coated women with silk scarves around their heads, large men in tweed overcoats and porkpie hats.

Suddenly Aggie sat upright. Arms folded on the rails, just like one of the gentry, cloth cap flat on his head, grinning widely at the camera was Uncle Charlie! There was no mistaking that scrawny figure. The camera stopped on him for a moment and he even lifted one hand in greeting.

Aggie sat with thumping heart and open mouth, immobile in her chair.

Then the horses were on again, stalking elegantly in their blankets. Then the jockeys were mounting and they were cantering down to the start, into the mist and out of range of the camera.

Gradually the sound of her charging heart subsided. She took a large swig of lukewarm tea and lit a cigarette with a shaking hand. Silly sod! Her imagination was working overtime—must have been that Guinness at lunchtime.

Still, she was relieved when the program moved to the Arms Park for the International.

The singing had started, the full-throated harmony of sixty thousand Welshmen. Aggie liked a bit of community singing. She settled back in her chair. The camera scanned the packed stands, the serried ranks of Welshmen singing lustily for the motherland, and there, right in the middle of Sospan Fach, was Uncle Charlie, his head back, his chest out, his voice raised to the gray Welsh skies.

Mother of God! Aggie moved this time. She leaped to her feet and switched off the television. She made another cup of tea, lit another cigarette. Alice Smithers was right. She shouldn't be alone. She sipped at the scalding tea, then hurried out to the hall, dragged her coat from the hall stand, and left, slamming the front door behind her.

"My, Aggie, you're looking a bit shaky," Alice remarked as she led her into the back room. "Finding it a bit of a strain after all, are you? Never mind, dear, you're bound to grieve for a while. Sit yourself down here. I'm watching the game all by myself, so I'm glad you've

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come round. The others have gone to see United."

Aggie glanced fearfully at the flickering set, but comforted herself. She'd be all right here with Alice.

All was well until Wales scored the first try, then the ground erupted with cheering, flag-waving Welshmen. Back went the camera over the crowd and Aggie cringed in her seat. Yes, there he was, the old devil, waving a great Welsh dragon, his face wreathed in a thousand smiling creases. He waved the flag enthusiastically at the camera.

"There," Aggie gasped, "there, did you see that? Did you see *that*?"

Alice was busy sorting out her knitting. "What, dear? What's the matter?"

"I thought I saw . . ." Aggie's voice trailed off. "Oh, nothing. It's nothing."

She sweated it out for another hour. Uncle Charlie was all over the place—in the stands at the Arms Park, on the rails in Newmarket, by the finishing line at the motorcycle racing. And Alice didn't even notice anything. Aggie waited and waited for her to say something, but Alice chatted on, clicking her needles just as though everything was quite normal.

Aggie just had to go home in the end. She knew Alice thought she was being a bit odd, but there was no help for that. She just had to go home and lie down for a bit.

She didn't put the television on again that night. She lay in her bed in the little front bedroom, the blankets up round her, trying to fall asleep, thinking about Uncle Charlie. It wouldn't be so bad if he hadn't looked as though he was enjoying himself all the time. It was hours before she eventually dropped off.

It was late Sunday evening before she dared put the telly on again. She sat and thought about it for a long time, working out that she had only seen Uncle Charlie on those outdoors broadcasts, around the country. It was obvious that he couldn't possibly be on anything like a film.

There was some old Western on the I.T.V. She had him at last.

But believe it or not, there, right in the middle of a barroom brawl, guns at his hips, a day-old bristle on his face—there was Uncle Charlie. His face loomed sardonic and somehow American, but it was still unmistakably Uncle Charlie's face.

Aggie was both frightened and enraged. "Rotten old bum," she screamed. "Can't

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leave a body in peace. Ruining me comfort and quiet."

Uncle Charlie grinned and twirled his guns. Aggie snarled and sobbed. "Dirty old slob," she raged, and whirling, she aimed a kick at the television, missed and lost her balance. Steadying herself on the fender, the poker was right by her nose, and without a second thought, half blinded by terror and fury, Aggie seized the poker and swung a mighty blow at Uncle Charlie's face. There was a tremendous shattering of glass, and smoke and sparks flew from the television set. Then there was silence.

Aggie stood, breathing heavily, the poker still in her hand, surveying the ruin of her television set. Uncle Charlie was gone, but so was her lovely telly.

"Oh, you dirty, filthy, stinking old man," she groaned.

A long while later Aggie still stood in the middle of the floor, surrounded by glass and trailing wires and the empty staring hole in the metal box. The silence became unbearable. She could never stand silence. Like a zombie she moved across the room and switched on the radio. It must have been years since she had last listened to the radio.

There was a great deal of crackling and static, then the waves cleared and faintly but clearly through the ether came the old man's quavering voice.

"I said I'd get you, Aggie Williams. I said I'd get you."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 373rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an unusual and disturbingly contemporary story, told with great control and economy . . .

The author, Dick Lochte, is in his mid-thirties. He was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. After a stint in the Coast Guard he moved to Chicago where he worked for ten years in the Promotion and Publicity Department of Playboy, during which time he wrote free-lance articles on the mystery field for Chicago newspapers.

At the time of this writing Mr. Lochte is based in California and devoting full time to free-lancing. His nonfiction articles have appeared in Playboy, TV Guide, and in Chicago and Los Angeles newspapers. His hobbies include the collecting of old pulp magazines, of first editions of detective stories, and of old radio shows featuring fictional detectives. And now he has turned to writing mystery fiction. We are happy to publish his first story in EQMM and to welcome Mr. Lochte as a player in "the grandest game in the world" . . .

MEDFORD & SON

by DICK LOCHTE

Medford stood before the desk sergeant, shifting his body nervously, painfully aware of the glances being tossed his way by curious cops walking to and from the lockup. It was nearly seven—the end of an imperfect day at the office, appropriately capped off by a report on the TV evening news that his son, Jerry, had been arrested in connection with the bombing of a suburban bank. There had been no phone call from Jerry, just an impersonal broadcaster stating a simple fact for the benefit of two million viewers.

When the boy appeared, in the company of Steiner, Medford's lawyer, he was hardly recognizable. Medford was sure

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he had seen him only a week before. Or had it been a month? In either case, it did not seem possible that his son could have let himself go to such a degree in so short a time. His clothes were faded, patched by a crude hand. His hair and beard looked like the after affects of an electric shock, and his eyes were sunk back in his milk-white face. Medford had to look away.

Steiner arranged for bail and, after chastising the boy in a cool and rational manner, left them standing there, father and son, beside Medford's long sedan. "If you want to see your mother," Medford said, "I can give you a lift. You'll have to cab it back."

The ride was a particularly difficult one for Medford. He was struggling with a problem that had no solution. The boy mistakenly took his silence as a rebuke and after ten minutes snarled, "Well, out with it. I'm a disgrace to the family. I heard it all from Steiner. Might as well hear it from you."

His father had not been expecting a request for conversation. It took a few moments for him to put his mind to it. "I don't even think of you in terms of family any more," he told the boy. "I used to hope that one day you'd come into the bond business with me. My God, I used to dream about it. I could see a bronze plaque: *Medford & Son, Bonds and Investments.* I gave up that dream a year ago when you dropped out of college and moved away from home."

"That's facing up to reality."

"It's time you did the same. You could have killed someone."

The boy took out a cigarette, lit it. "People are killing—we call it 'offing'—every minute. But you know all about that. The Great God Stock Market rises and falls in direct ratio to the number of deaths in Vietnam. You feed bodies into the war machine, pull the lever, and out pours money."

Medford wearily entered the argument. "That's utter nonsense, Jerry, and you know it."

"I only know what I can see and what I can feel."

"Then you're looking at and touching the wrong things."

The boy jerked around at him. "Wow, that's smug. You've got yours and the hell with everybody else. Just hang onto that doting wife and that fat bankbook and that vine-covered house in the suburbs."

Medford continued to stare at the road. "Every now and then," he stated drily, "something comes along to screw things up."

"Meaning me?"

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"Of course, meaning you. My son. It was all for you. When you first became involved in those demonstrations I tried to put some sense into your head. Now it's too late. Blowing up a bank."

"Forgive me for disturbing your tranquil existence."

"Disturb? Why, boy, you've brought it to a screeching halt." Jerry looked out of his window, emotionless for a moment. "Just what is it that makes you so hostile?" his father asked.

"The condition of life in these United States. Fascist pigs, hypocritical politicians, poisoned air . . . aw, hell, why keep this up?"

"So now, at twenty, you have a police record and the dubious distinction of an upcoming F.B.I. investigation. But these, in some strange way, will aid man in his quest for a perfect society."

"Don't try to mess up my head," the boy almost shouted. "Not when I've just got it together. Listen, didn't it ever occur to you to just once step out of line to try and improve things?"

"By bombing a bank?"

"By doing *anything.*"

"I happen to like conditions the way they are. Correction, make that 'were.' "

"Didn't you ever believe in anything enough to want to defend that belief at any cost, even of your life?" When Medford wouldn't answer him the boy slumped back against the leather seat.

As the sedan turned onto the blue-gravel drive leading to his home, Medford could not stop himself from saying, "You've blown it for all of us, Jerry."

"Don't lay that on me. I may get sent up for a while, but I accepted that possibility from the start. About you and mother—well, all your friends will be properly sympathetic. You'll be like a couple of neighborhood folk heroes—the good parents whose son went radical freak for no apparent reason."

Jerry's frustration had been building up. Suddenly it burst. "This is senseless," he shouted, jerking open the door of the still-moving car. Medford jammed his foot on the brakes. Once outside, the boy shouted back, "Medford & Son? Man, we're not even on the same planet. I don't believe we have the same blood in our veins."

Jerry slammed the door and ran toward the house. His father looked after him, trying to remember what it had been like when he was young.

The boy decided not to stay for dinner and Medford felt a sense of relief. He had business to take care of, but first he

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wanted to spend some time with his wife, to do whatever he could to lift her spirits. After a slow, almost silent dinner he finally settled on tucking her neatly in bed, her wide eyes searching his face for some sign of hope. The boy was their only child. Medford told her that he thought he could straighten things out. It was a lie he felt he owed her.

In his study Medford frowned at the open French doors leading to the patio. Then he saw the plump balding man standing beside his treasured wall of books.

"Some kid you've got," the plump man said in a husky, not unpleasant voice. "A bomber, no less."

"They reach an age when you lose whatever hold you've ever had on them," Medford tried to explain.

"I wouldn't know about that," the plump man replied. "I really am sorry."

"So am I," Medford sighed.

The other man brushed a speck of dust off a leather-bound volume with one gray-gloved finger. "We've worked together for a long time."

"Twenty-five—no, it's closer to twenty-six years."

"A long time," the plump man repeated, turning to face his friend. "Do you have the papers ready?"

"I wasn't expecting you so soon," Medford answered truthfully. He crossed the room to a large framed splash of color on the wall and pushed it aside, exposing a small safe. The plump man moved closer, looking inside the safe when Medford opened it.

Medford smiled at the man's caution and handed him a neat portfolio containing papers and documents. "This all?" the plump man asked.

Medford nodded. "Not much for twenty-six years."

"I was ordered to move quickly on this, Medford," the other told him, a bit sheepishly. "A man with too much time to think often does something foolish." Medford wasn't certain which one of them the plump man was talking about.

With the portfolio under one arm the other man removed a gun from inside his coat. "After the F.B.I. finishes with that wild-haired youngster of yours they'll go after you. That's how it is—guilt by association. They'd discover that the real Medford died in the war. Before you know it, all our covers would be blown. It must end with you, friend. I'm to make it look like suicide. Despondency over your boy's problem."

"Jerry's got enough hang-ups without having to feel guilty about my death."

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"I'm sorry, but we must do it this way. That's how they want it. We agreed to abide by their wishes long ago."

Medford nodded to the man with the gun, his friend. "You know, I can't remember what motivated me to volunteer to come to this country. It was so long ago."

"Now we just do as we're told. Once we had our personal reasons for our actions." The plump man shook his head wistfully. "Those were the days, eh, Medford? We may not have bombed banks, but all the same we made them sit up and take notice. It's ironical, you know. If your son hadn't been such a chip off the old block I wouldn't be here on this regrettable mission."

The thought had somehow not occurred to Medford before. A chip off the old block. There was some satisfaction in that. Even as the plump man's face turned somber and his finger tightened on the trigger, Medford was lost in a new version of his old fantasy. This time the bronze plaque read: *Medford & Son, Revolutions.* He was happier than he'd been in years.

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a LEW ARCHER novelet by

ROSS MACDONALD

Many readers and most critics are agreed that Ross Macdonald, creator of private detective Lew Archer, now wears the crown that once rested so fittingly on the head of Dashiell Hammett, and later on the head of Raymond Chandler. And there is no sign whatever in Ross Macdonald's newest work that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." In his own detective domain Ross Macdonald is undisputed king . . .

In this long novelet, "The Missing Sister Case," you will share Lew Archer's thoughts and feelings—as when he feels "a worm of blood crawling past" his ear. Will "something heavier than sleep or tiredness" sit on the back of your neck, too? And as for Lew Archer's thoughts, try this one for size: this case of a missing blonde (and of missing money) is "a nasty business," and nastiness, Archer reminds us, has a way of "rubbing off on all of us" . . .

THE MISSING SISTER CASE

by ROSS MACDONALD

I picked her up on the Daylight. Or maybe she picked me up. With some of the nicest girls, you never know.

She seemed to be very nice, and very young. She had a flippant nose and wide blue eyes, the kind that men like to call innocent. Her hair bubbled like boiling gold around her small blue hat. When she turned from the window to hear my deathless comments on the landscape and the weather, she wafted spring odors toward me.

She laughed in the right places, a little hectically. But in between, when the conversation lagged, I could see a certain somberness in her eyes, a pinched look around her mouth like the effects of an early frost. When I asked her to join me in the buffet car for a drink, she said, "Oh, no. Thank you. I couldn't possibly."

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"Why not?"

"I'm not quite twenty-one, for one thing. You wouldn't want to contribute to the delinquency of a minor?"

"It sounds like a pleasant enterprise."

She veiled her eyes and turned away. The green hills plunged backward past the train window like giant dolphins against the flat blue background of the sea. The afternoon sun was bright on her hair. I hoped I hadn't offended her.

I hadn't. After a while she leaned toward me and touched my arm with hesitant fingertips.

"Since you're so kind, I'll tell you what I would like." She wrinkled her nose in an anxious way. "A sandwich? Would it cost so very much more than a drink?"

"A sandwich it is."

On the way to the diner she caught the eye of every man on the train who wasn't asleep. Even some of the sleeping ones stirred, as if her passing had induced a dream. I censored my personal dream. She was too young for me, too innocent. I told myself that my interest was strictly paternal.

She asked me to order her a turkey sandwich, all white meat, and drummed on the tablecloth until it arrived. It disappeared in no time. She was ravenous.

"Have another," I said.

She gave me a look which wasn't exactly calculating, just questioning. "Do you really think I should?"

"Why not? You're pretty hungry."

"Yes, I am. But—" She blushed. "I hate to ask a stranger—you know?"

"No personal obligation. I like to see hungry people eat."

"You're awfully generous. And I am awfully hungry. Are you sure you can afford it?"

"Money is no object. I just collected a thousand-dollar fee in San Francisco. If you can use a full-course dinner, say so."

"Oh, no, I couldn't accept that. But I will confess that I could eat another sandwich."

I signaled to the waiter. The second sandwich went the way of the first while I drank coffee. She ate the olives and slices of pickle, too.

"Feeling better now? You were looking a little peaked."

"Much better, thank you. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I hadn't eaten all day. And I've been on short rations for a week."

I looked her over deliberately. Her dark blue suit was new, and expensively cut. Her bag was fine calfskin. Tiny diamonds winked in the white-gold case of her wrist watch.

"I know what you're think-

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ing," she said. "I could have pawned something. Only I couldn't *bear* to. I spent my last cent on my ticket—I waited till the very last minute, when I had just enough to pay my fare."

"What were you waiting for?"

"To hear from Ethel. But we won't go into that." Her eyes shuttered themselves, and her pretty mouth became less pretty. "It's my worry."

"All right."

"I don't mean to be rude, or ungrateful. I thought I could hold out until I got to Los Angeles. I would have, too, if you hadn't broken me down with kindness."

"Forget about my kindness. I hope there's a job waiting for you in Los Angeles. Or maybe a husband?"

"No." The idea of a husband, or possibly a job, appealed to her sense of humor. She giggled like a schoolgirl. "You have one more guess."

"Okay. You flunked out of school and couldn't face the family."

"You're half right. But I'm still enrolled at Berkeley, and I have no intention of flunking out. I'm doing very well in my courses."

"What are you taking?"

"Psychology and sociology, mostly. I plan to be a psychiatric social worker."

"You don't look the type."

"I am, though." The signs of early frost showed on her face again. I couldn't keep up with her moods. She was suddenly very serious. "I'm interested in helping people in trouble. I've seen a great deal of trouble. And so many people need help in the modern world."

"You can say that again."

Her clear gaze came up to my face. "You're interested in people, too, aren't you? Are you a doctor, or a lawyer?"

"What gave you that idea?"

"You mentioned a fee you earned, a thousand-dollar fee. It sounded as if you were a professional man."

"I don't know if you'd call my job a profession. I'm a private detective. My name is Archer."

Her reaction was disconcerting. She gripped the edge of the table with her hands and pushed herself away from it. She said in a whisper as thin and sharp as a razor, "Did Edward hire you? To spy on me?"

"Of course. Naturally. It's why I mentioned the fact that I'm a detective. I'm very cunning. And who in hell is Edward?"

"Edward Illman." She was breathing fast. "Are you sure he didn't employ you to contact

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ne? Cross your heart?"

The waiter edged toward our able, drawn by the urgent note n her voice. "Anything the natter, lady?"

"No. It's all right, thank you. The sandwiches were fine."

She managed to give him a strained smile, and he went away with a backward look.

"I'll make a clean breast of everything," I said. "Edward employed me to feed you drugged sandwiches. The kitchen staff is in my pay, and you'll soon begin to feel the effects of the drug. After that comes the abduction, by helicopter."

"Please. You mustn't joke about such things. I wouldn't put it past him, after what he did to Ethel."

"Ethel?"

"My sister, my older sister. Ethel's a darling. But Edward doesn't think so. He hates her—he hates us both. I wouldn't be surprised if he's responsible for all this."

"All what?" I said. "We seem to be getting nowhere. Obviously you're in some sort of a bind. You want to tell me about it, I want to hear about it. Now, take a deep breath and start over, from the beginning. Bear in mind that I don't know these people from Adam. I don't even know your name."

"I'm sorry, my name is Clare Larrabee." Dutifully, she inhaled. "I've been talking like a silly fool, haven't I? It's because I'm so anxious about Ethel. I haven't heard from her for several weeks. I have no idea where she is or what's happened to her. Last week, when my allowance didn't come, I began to get really worried. I phoned her house in West Hollywood and got no answer. Since then I've been phoning at least once a day, with never an answer.

"So finally I swallowed my pride and got in touch with Edward. He said he hasn't seen her since she went to Nevada. Not that I believe him, necessarily. He'd just as soon lie as tell the truth. He perjured himself right and left when they arranged the settlement."

"Let's get Edward straight," I said. "Is he your sister's husband?"

"He was. Ethel divorced him last month. And she's well rid of him, even if he did cheat her out of her fair share of the property. He claimed to be a pauper, practically, but I know better. He's a very successful real estate operator—you must have heard of the Illman Tracts."

"This is the same Illman?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Not personally. I used to see his name in the columns. Quite a Casanova, isn't he?"

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"Edward is a dreadful man. Why Ethel ever married him ... Of course she wanted security, to be able to send me to college, and everything. But I'd have gone to work, gladly, if I could have stopped the marriage. I could see what kind of a husband he'd make. He even had the nerve to make a—make advances to me at the wedding reception."

"And now you're thinking he had something to do with your sister's disappearance?"

"Either that, or she did away with— No, I'm sure it's Edward. He sounded so smug on the long-distance telephone yesterday, as if he'd just swallowed the canary. I tell you, that man is capable of anything. If something's happened to Ethel, I know who's responsible."

"Probably nothing has. She could have gone off on a little trip by herself."

"You don't know Ethel. We've always kept in close touch, and she's been so punctual with my allowance. She'd never dream of going away and leaving me stranded at school without any money. I held out as long as I could, expecting to hear from her. When I got down below twenty dollars, I decided to take the train home."

"To Ethel's house in West Hollywood?"

"Yes. It's the only home I have since Daddy passed away. Ethel's the only family I have. I couldn't bear to lose Ethel." Her eyes filmed with tears.

"Do you have taxi fare?"

She shook her head, shamefaced.

"I'll drive you out. I don't live far from there myself. My car's stashed in a garage near Union Station."

"You're being good to me." Her hand crept out across the tablecloth and pressed the back of mine. "Forgive me for saying those silly things, about Edward hiring you."

I told her that would be easy.

We drove out Sunset and up into the hills. Afternoon was changing into evening. The late sunlight flashed like intermittent searchlights from the western windows of the hillside apartment buildings. Clare huddled anxiously in the far corner of the seat. She didn't speak, except to direct me to her sister's house.

It was a flat-roofed building set high on a sloping lot. The walls were redwood and glass, and the redwood had not yet weathered gray. I parked on the slanting blacktop drive and got out. Both stalls of the carport under the house were empty. The draperies were pulled over

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the picture windows that overlooked the valley.

I knocked on the front door. The noise resounded emptily through the building. I tried it. It was locked. So was the service door at the side.

I turned to the girl at my elbow. She was clutching the handle of her overnight bag with both hands, and looking pinched again. I thought that it was a cold homecoming for her.

"Nobody home," I said.

"It's what I was afraid of. What shall I do now?"

"You share this house with your sister?"

"When I'm home from school."

"And it belongs to her?"

"Since the divorce it does."

"Then you can give me permission to break in."

"All right. But please don't damage anything if you can help it. Ethel is very proud of her house."

The side door had a spring-type lock. I took a rectangle of plastic out of my wallet and slipped it into the crack between the door and the frame. The lock slid back easily.

"You're quite a burglar," she said in a dismal attempt at humor.

I stepped inside without answering her. The kitchen was bright and clean, but it had a slightly musty, disused odor. The bread in the breadbox was stale. The refrigerator needed defrosting. There was a piece of ham moldering on one shelf, and on another a half-empty bottle of milk which had gone sour.

"She's been gone for some time," I said. "At least a week. We should check her clothes."

"Why?"

"She'd take some along if she left to go on a trip, under her own power."

She led me through the living room, which was simply and expensively furnished in black iron and net, into the master bedroom. The huge square bed was neatly made and covered with a pink quilted silk spread. Clare avoided looking at it, as though the conjunction of a man and a bed gave her a guilty feeling. While she went through the closet I searched the vanity and the chest of drawers.

They were barer than they should have been. Cosmetics were conspicuous by their absence. I found one thing of interest in the top drawer of the vanity, hidden under a tangle of stockings: a bankbook issued by the Las Vegas branch of the Bank of Southern California. Ethel Illman had deposited $30,000 on March 14 of this year. On March 17 she had withdrawn $5,000. On March

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20 she had withdrawn $6,000. On March 22 she had withdrawn $18,995. There was a balance in her account, after service charges, of $3.65.

Clare said from the closet in a muffled voice, "A lot of her things are gone. Her mink stole, her good suits and shoes, a lot of her best summer clothes."

"Then she's probably on a vacation." I tried to keep the doubt out of my voice. A woman wandering around with $30,000 in cash was taking a big chance. I decided not to worry Clare with that, and put the little bankbook in my pocket.

"Without telling me? Ethel wouldn't do that." She came out of the closet, pushing her fine light hair back from her forehead. "You don't understand how close we are to each other, closer than sisters usually are. Ever since father died—"

"Does she drive her own car?"

"Of course. It's a last year's Buick convertible, robin's-egg blue."

"If you're badly worried, go to Missing Persons."

"No. Ethel wouldn't like that. She's a very proud person, and shy. Anyway, I have a better idea." She gave me that questioning-calculating look of hers.

"Involving me?"

"Please." Her eyes in the darkening room were like great soft centerless pansies, purple or black. "You're a detective and evidently a good one. And you're a man. You can stand up to Edward and make him answer questions. He just laughs at me. Of course I can't pay you in advance—"

"Forget the money for now. What makes you so certain that Illman is in on this?"

"I just know he is. He threatened her in the lawyer's office the day they made the settlement. She told me so herself. Edward said that he was going to get that money back if he had to take it out of her hide. He wasn't fooling, either. He's beaten her more than once."

"How much was the settlement?"

"Thirty thousand dollars and the house and the car. She could have collected much more, hundreds of thousands, if she'd stayed in California and fought it through the courts. But she was too anxious to get free from him. So she let him cheat her and got a Nevada divorce instead. And even then he wasn't satisfied."

She looked around the abandoned bedroom, fighting back tears. Her skin was so pale that it seemed to be phosphorescent in the gloom. With a little

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cry she flung herself face down on the bed and gave herself over to grief.

I said to her shaking back, "You win. Where do I find him?"

He lived in a cottage hotel on the outskirts of Bel-Air. The gates of the walled pueblo were standing open, and I went in. A few couples were strolling on the gravel paths among the palm-shaded cottages, walking off the effects of the cocktail hour or working up an appetite for dinner. The women were blonde and had money on their backs. The men were noticeably older than the women, except for one, who was noticeably younger.

I passed an oval swimming pool and found Edward Illman's cottage, number twelve. Light streamed from its open French windows onto a flagstone terrace. A young woman in a narrow-waisted, billowing black gown lay on a chrome chaise at the edge of the light. With her arms hanging loose from her naked shoulders she looked like an expensive French doll which somebody had accidentally dropped there. Her face was polished and plucked and painted, expressionless as a doll's. But her eyes snapped open at the sound of my footsteps.

"Who goes there?" she said with a slight Martini accent. "Halt and give the password or I'll shoot you dead with my atomic wonder-weapon." She pointed a wavering finger at me and said, "Bing. Am I supposed to know you? I have a terrible memory for faces."

"I have a terrible face for memories. Is Mr. Illman home?"

"Uh-huh. He's in the shower. He's always taking showers. I told him he's got a scour-and-scrub neurosis, his mother was frightened by a washing machine." Her laughter rang like cracked bells. "If it's about business you can tell me."

"Are you his confidential secretary?"

"I was." She sat up on the chaise, looked pleased with herself. "I'm his fiancée, at the moment."

"Congratulations."

"Uh-huh. He's loaded." Smiling to herself, she got to her feet. "Are you loaded?"

"Not s[illegible] it gets in my way."

She pointed her finger at me and said bing again and laughed, teetering on her four-inch heels. She started to fall forward. I caught her under the armpits.

"Too bad," she said to my chest. "I don't think you have a terrible face for memories at all. You're much prettier than old Teddy-bear."

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"Thanks. I'll treasure the compliment."

I set her down on the chaise, but her arms twined round my neck like smooth white snakes, and her body arched against me. She clung to me like a drowning child. I had to use force to detach myself.

"What's the matter?" she said with an up-and-under look.

A man appeared in the French windows, blotting out most of the light. In a white terry-cloth bathrobe he had the shape and bulk of a Kodiak bear. The top of his head was as bald as an ostrich egg. He carried a chip on each shoulder, like epaulets.

"What goes on?"

"Your fiancée swooned, slightly."

"Fiancée, hell. I saw what happened." Moving very quickly and lightly for a man of his age and weight, he pounced on the girl on the chaise and began to shake her. "Can't you keep your hands off anything in pants?"

Her head bobbed back and forth. Her teeth clicked like castanets.

I put a rough hand on his shoulder. "Leave her be."

He turned on me. "Who do you think you're talking to?"

"Edward Illman, I presume."

"And who are you?"

"The name is Archer. I'm looking into the matter of your wife's disappearance."

"I'm not married. And I have no intention of getting married. I've been burned once." He looked down sideways at the girl. She peered up at him in silence, hugging her shoulders.

"Your ex-wife, then," I said.

"Has something happened to Ethel?"

"I thought you might be able to tell me."

"Where did you get that idea? Have you been talking to Clare?"

I nodded.

"Don't believe her. She's got a down on me, just like her sister. Because I had the misfortune to marry Ethel, they both think I'm fair game for anything they want to pull. I wouldn't touch either one of them with an insulated pole. They're a couple of hustlers, if you want the truth. They took me for sixty grand, and what did I get out of it but headaches?"

"I thought it was thirty."

"Sixty," he said, with the money light in his eyes. "Thirty in cash, and the house is worth another thirty easily."

I looked around the place, which must have cost him a hundred dollars a day. Above the palms, the first few stars sparkled like solitaire diamonds.

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"You seem to have some left."

"Sure I have. But I work for my money. Ethel was strictly from nothing when I met her. She owned the clothes on her back and what was under them and that was all. So she gives me a bad time for three years and I pay off at the rate of twenty grand a year. I ask you, is that fair?"

"I hear you threatened to get it back from her."

"You have been talking to Clare, eh? All right, so I threatened her. It didn't mean a thing. I talk too much sometimes and I have a bad temper."

"I'd never have guessed."

The girl said, "You hurt me, Teddy. I need another drink. Get me another drink, Teddy."

"Get it yourself."

She called him several bad names and wandered into the cottage, walking awkwardly like an animated doll.

He grasped my arm. "What's the trouble about Ethel? You said she disappeared. You think something's happened to her?"

I removed his hand. "She's missing. Thirty thousand in cash is also missing. There are creeps in Vegas who would knock her off for one big bill, or less."

"Didn't she bank the money? She wouldn't cash a draft for that amount and carry it around. She's crazy, but not that way."

"She banked it all right, on March fourteenth. Then she drew it all out again in the course of the following week. When did you send her the draft?"

"The twelfth or the thirteenth. That was the agreement. She got her final divorce on March eleventh."

"And you haven't seen her since?"

"I have not. Frieda has, though."

"Frieda?"

"My secretary." He jerked a thumb toward the cottage. "Frieda went over to the house last week to pick up some of my clothes I'd left behind. Ethel was there, and she was all right then. Apparently she's taken up with another man."

"Do you know his name?"

"No, and I couldn't care less."

"Do you have a picture of Ethel?"

"I did have some. I tore them up. She's a well-stacked blonde, natural blonde. She looks very much like Clare, same coloring, but three or four years older. You should be able to get a picture from Clare. And while you're at it, tell her for me she's got a lot of gall setting the police on me. I'm a

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respectable businessman in this town."

He puffed out his chest under the bathrobe. It was thickly matted with brown hair, which was beginning to grizzle.

"No doubt," I said. "Incidentally, I'm not the police. I run a private agency. My name is Archer."

"So that's how it is, eh?" The planes of his broad face gleamed angrily in the light. He cocked a fat red fist. "You come here pumping me. Get out, by God, or I'll throw you out!"

"Calm down. I could break you in half."

His face swelled with blood and his eyes popped. He swung a roundhouse right at my head. I stepped inside of it and tied him up. "I said calm down, old man. You'll break a vein."

I pushed him off balance and released him. He sat down very suddenly on the chaise. Frieda was watching us from the edge of the terrace. She laughed so heartily that she spilled her drink.

Illman looked old and tired and he was breathing raucously through his mouth. He didn't try to get up. Frieda came over to me and leaned her weight on my arm.

"Why didn't you hit him," she whispered, "when you had the chance? He's always hitting other people." Her voice rose. "Teddy-bear thinks he can get away with murder."

"Shut your yap," he said, "or I'll shut it for you."

"Button yours, muscle-man. You'll lay a hand on me once too often."

"You're fired."

"I already quit."

They were a charming couple. I was on the point of tearing myself away when a bellboy popped out of the darkness.

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Illman."

The gentleman was a brown-faced young Highway Patrolman, who stepped forward rather diffidently into the light. "Sorry to trouble you, sir. Our San Diego office asked me to contact you as soon as possible."

Frieda looked from me to him and began to gravitate in his direction. Illman got up heavily and stepped between them.

"What is it?"

The patrolman unfolded a teletype flimsy and held it up to the light. "Are you the owner of a blue Buick convertible, last year's model?" He read off the license number.

"It was mine," Illman said. "It belongs to my ex-wife now. Did she forget to change the registration?"

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"Evidently she did, Mr. Illman. In fact, she seems to've forgotten the car entirely. She left it in a parking space above the public beach in La Jolla. It's been sitting there for the last week, until we hauled it in. Where can I get in touch with Mrs. Illman?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her for some time."

The patrolman's face lengthened and turned grim. "You mean she's dropped out of sight?"

"Out of my sight, at least. Why?"

"I hate to have to say this, Mr. Illman. There's a considerable quantity of blood on the front seat of the Buick, according to this report. They haven't determined yet if it's human blood, but it raises the suspicion of foul play."

"Good heavens! It's what we've been afraid of, isn't it, Archer?" His voice was as thick as corn syrup with phony emotion. "You and Clare were right after all."

"Right about what, Mr. Illman?" The patrolman looked slightly puzzled.

"About poor Ethel," he said. "I've been discussing her disappearance with Mr. Archer here. Mr. Archer is a private detective and I was just about to engage his services to make a search for Ethel." He turned to me with a painful smile pulling his mouth to one side. "How much did you say you wanted in advance? Five hundred?"

"Make it two. That will buy my services for four days. It doesn't buy anything else, though."

"I understand that, Mr. Archer. I'm sincerely interested in finding Ethel for a variety of reasons, as you know."

He was a suave old fox. I almost laughed in his face. But I played along with him. I liked the idea of using his money to hang him, if possible.

"Yeah. This is a tragic occurrence for you."

He took a silver money clip shaped like a dollar sign out of his bathrobe pocket. I wondered if he didn't trust his roommate. Two bills changed hands. After a further exchange of information, the patrolman went away.

"Well," Illman said. "It looks like a pretty serious business. If you think I had anything to do with it, you're off your rocker."

"Speaking of rockers, you said your wife was crazy. What kind of crazy?"

"I was her husband, not her analyst. I wouldn't know."

"Did she need an analyst?"

"Sometimes I thought so. One week she'd be flying, full of big plans to make money

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Then she'd go into a black mood and talk about killing herself." He shrugged. "It ran in her family."

"This could be an afterthought on your part."

His face reddened.

I turned to Frieda, who looked as if the news had sobered her. "Who was this fellow you saw at Ethel's house last week?"

"I dunno. She called him Owen, I think. Maybe it was his first name, maybe it was his last name. She didn't introduce us." She said it as if she felt cheated.

"Describe him?"

"Sure. A big guy, over six feet, wide in the shoulders, narrow in the beam. A smooth hunk of male. And young," with a malicious glance at Illman. "Black hair, and he had all of it, dreamy dark eyes, a cute little hairline mustache. I tabbed him for a gin-mill cowboy from Vegas, but he could be a movie star if I was a producer."

"What made you think she'd taken up with him?"

"The way he moved around the house, like he owned it. He poured himself a drink while I was there. And he was in his shirtsleeves. A real sharp dresser. Custom-made stuff."

"You have a good eye."

"For men, she has," Illman said.

"Lay off me," she said in a hard voice, with no trace of the Martini drawl. "Or I'll really walk out on you and then where will you be?"

"Right where I am now. Sitting pretty."

"That's what you think."

I interrupted their communion. "Do you know anything about this Owen character, Illman?"

"Not a thing. He's probably some jerk she picked up in Nevada while she was sweating out the divorce."

"Have you been to San Diego recently?"

"Not for months."

"That's true," Frieda said. "I've been keeping close track of Teddy. I have to. Incidentally, it's getting late and I'm hungry. Go and put on some clothes, darling. You're prettier with clothes on."

"More than I'd say for you," he leered.

I left them and drove back to West Hollywood. The night-blooming girls and their escorts had begun to appear on the Strip. Gusts of music came from the doors that opened for them. But when I turned off Sunset, the streets were deserted.

All the lights were on in the redwood house on the hillside. I parked in the driveway and knocked on the front door. The

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draperies over the window beside it were pulled to one side, then fell back into place. A thin voice drifted out to me.

"Is that you, Mr. Archer?"

I said that it was. Clare opened the door inch by inch. Her face was almost haggard.

"I'm so relieved to see you."

"What's the trouble?"

"A man was watching the house. He was sitting there at the curb in a long black car. It looked like an undertaker's car. And it had a Nevada license."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. It lighted up when he drove away. I saw it through the window. He only left a couple of minutes ago."

"Did you get a look at his face?"

"I'm afraid not. I didn't dare go out. I was petrified. He shined a searchlight on the window."

"Take it easy. There are plenty of big black cars in town, and quite a few Nevada licenses. He was probably looking for some other address."

"No. I had a—a kind of a fatal feeling when I saw him. I just *know* that he's connected in some way with Ethel's disappearance. I'm scared."

She leaned against the door, breathing quickly. She looked very young and vulnerable. I said, "What am I going to do with you, kid? I can't leave you here alone."

"Are you going away?"

"I have to. I saw Edward. While I was there, he had a visitor from the HP. They found your sister's car abandoned near San Diego." I didn't mention the blood. She had enough on her mind.

"Edward killed her!" she cried. "I knew it."

"That I doubt. She may not even be dead. I'm going to San Diego to find out."

"Take me along, won't you?"

"It wouldn't be good for your reputation. Besides, you'd be in the way."

"No, I wouldn't. I promise. I have friends in San Diego. Just let me drive down there with you and I can stay with them."

"You wouldn't be making this up?"

"Honest, I have friends there. Gretchen Falk and her husband, they're good friends of Ethel's and mine. We lived in San Diego for a while, before she married Edward. The Falks will be glad to let me stay with them."

"Hadn't you better phone them first?"

"I can't. The phone's disconnected. I tried it."

"Are you sure these people exist?"

"Of course!" she said.

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I gave in. I turned out the lights, locked the door, and put her bag in my car. Clare stayed very close to me.

As I was backing out, a car pulled in behind me, blocking the entrance to the driveway. I opened the door and got out. It was a black Lincoln with a searchlight mounted over the windshield.

Clare said, "He's come back."

The searchlight flashed on. Its bright beam swiveled toward me. I reached for the gun in my shoulder holster and got a firm grip on nothing. Holster and gun were packed in the suitcase in the trunk of my car. The searchlight blinded me.

A black gun emerged from the dazzle, towing a hand and an arm. They belonged to a quick-stepping cube-shaped man in a double-breasted flannel suit. A snap-brim hat was pulled down over his eyes. His mouth was as full of teeth as a barracuda's. It said, "Where's Dewar?"

"Never heard of him."

"Owen Dewar. You've heard of him."

The gun dragged him forward another step and collided with my breastbone. His free hand palmed my flanks. All I could see was his unchanging smile, framed in brilliant light. I felt a keen desire to do some orthodontic work on it. But the gun was an inhibiting factor.

"You must be thinking of two other parties," I said.

"No dice. This is the house and that's the broad. Out of the car, lady."

"I will not," she said in a tiny voice behind me.

"Out, or I'll blow a hole in your boy friend here."

Reluctantly she clambered out. The teeth looked down at her ankles as if they wanted to chew them. I made a move for the gun. It dived into my solar plexus, doubling me over. Its muzzle flicked the side of my head. It pushed me back against the fender of my car. I felt a worm of blood crawling past my ear.

"You coward! Leave him alone." Clare flung herself at him. He sidestepped neatly, moving on the steady pivot of the gun against my chest. She went to her knees on the blacktop.

"Get up, lady, but keep your voice down. How many boy friends you keep on the string, anyway?"

She got to her feet. "He isn't my boy friend. Who are you? Where is Ethel?"

"That's a hot one." The smile intensified. "You're Ethel. The question is, where's Dewar?"

"I don't know any Dewar."

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"Sure you do, Ethel. You know him well enough to marry him. Now tell me where he is and nobody gets theirselves hurt." The flat voice dropped, and added huskily, "Only I haven't got much time to waste."

"You're wrong," she said. "You're completely mistaken. I'm not Ethel. I'm Clare. Ethel's my older sister."

He stepped back and swung the gun in a quarter circle, covering us both. "Turn your face to the light. Let's have a good look at you."

She did as she was told, striking a rigid pose. He shifted the gun to his left hand and brought a photograph out of his inside pocket. Looking from it to her face, he shook his head doubtfully.

"I guess you're leveling at that. You're younger than this one, and thinner." He handed her the photograph. "She your sister?"

"Yes. It's Ethel."

I caught a glimpse of the picture over her shoulder. It was a blown-up candid shot of two people. One was a pretty blonde who looked like Clare five years from now. She was leaning on the arm of a tall dark man with a hairline mustache. They were smirking at each other and there was a flower-decked altar in the background.

"Who's the man?" I said.

"Dewar. Who else?" said the teeth behind the gun. "They got married in Vegas last month. I got this picture from the Chaparral Chapel. It goes with the twenty-five-dollar wedding." He snatched it out of Clare's hands and put it back in his pocket. "It took me a couple of weeks to run her down. She used her maiden name, see."

"Where did you catch up with her? San Diego?"

"I didn't catch up with her. Would I be here if I did?"

"What do you want her for?"

"I don't want her. I got nothing against the broad, except that she tied up with Dewar. He's the boy I want."

"What for?"

"You wouldn't be inarested. He worked for me at one time." The gun swiveled brightly toward Clare. "You know where your sister is?"

"No, I don't. I wouldn't tell you if I did."

"That's no way to talk now, lady. My motto's cooperation. From other people."

I said, "Her sister's been missing for a week. The HP found her car in San Diego. It had bloodstains on the front seat. Are you sure you didn't catch up with her?"

"I'm asking you the ques-

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tions, punk." But there was a trace of uncertainty in his voice. "What happened to Dewar if the blonde is missing?"

"I think he ran out with her money."

Clare turned to me. "You didn't tell me all this."

"I'm telling you now."

The teeth said, "She had money?"

"Plenty."

"The bum! The bum took us both, eh?"

"Dewar took you for money?"

"You ask too many questions, punk. You'll talk yourself to death one of these days. Now stay where you are for ten minutes, both of you. Don't move, don't yell, don't telephone. I might decide to drive around the block and come back and make sure."

He backed down the brilliant alley of the searchlight beam. The door of his car slammed. All its lights went off together. It rolled away into darkness and didn't come back.

It was past midnight when we got to San Diego, but there was still a light in the Falks's house. It was a stucco cottage on a street of identical cottages in Pacific Beach.

"We lived here once," Clare said. "When I was going to high school. That house, second from the corner." Her voice was nostalgic and she looked around the jerry-built tract as if it represented something precious to her. The pre-Illman era in her young life.

I knocked on the front door. A big henna-head in a housecoat opened it on a chain. But when she saw Clare beside me, she flung the door wide.

"Clare honey, where you been? I've been trying to phone you in Berkeley, and here you are. How are you, honey?"

She opened her arms and Clare walked into them.

"Oh, Gretchen," she said with her face on the redhead's breast. "Something's happened to Ethel, something terrible."

"I know it, honey, but it could be worse."

"Worse than murder?"

"She isn't murdered. Put that out of your mind. She's pretty badly hurt, but she isn't murdered."

Clare stood back to look at her face. "You've seen her? Is she here?"

The redhead put a finger to her mouth, which was big and generous-looking, like the rest of her. "Hush, Clare. Jake's asleep, he has to get up early, go to work. Yeah, I've seen her, but she isn't here. She's in a nursing home over on the other side of town."

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"You said she's badly hurt?"

"Pretty badly beaten, yeah, poor dear. But the doctor told me she's pulling out of it fine. A little plastic surgery and she'll be as good as new."

"Plastic surgery?"

"Yeah, I'm afraid she'll need it. I got a look at her face tonight, when they changed the bandages. Now take it easy, honey. It could be worse."

"Who did it to her?"

"That lousy husband of hers."

"Edward?"

"Heck, no. The other one. The one that calls himself Dewar, Owen Dewar."

I said, "Have you seen Dewar?"

"I saw him a week ago, the night he beat her up, the dirty rotten bully." Her deep contralto growled in her throat. "I'd like to get my hands on him just for five minutes."

"So would a lot of people, Mrs. Falk."

She glanced inquiringly at Clare. "Who's your friend? You haven't introduced us."

"I'm sorry. Mr. Archer, Mrs. Falk. Mr. Archer is a detective, Gretchen."

"I was wondering. Ethel didn't want me to call the police. I told her she ought to, but she said no. The poor darling's so ashamed of herself, getting mixed up with that kind of a louse. She didn't even get in touch with *me* until tonight. Then she saw in the paper about her car being picked up, and she thought maybe I could get it back for her without any publicity. Publicity is what she doesn't want most. I guess it's a tragic thing for a beautiful girl like Ethel to lose her looks."

I said, "There won't be any publicity if I can help it. Did you go to see the police about her car?"

"Jake advised me not to. He said it would blow the whole thing wide open. And the doctor told me he was kind of breaking the law by not reporting the beating she took. So I dropped it."

"How did this thing happen?"

"I'll tell you all I know about it. Come on into the living room, kids, let me fix you something to drink."

Clare said, "You're awfully kind, Gretchen, but I must go to Ethel. Where is she?"

"The Mission Rest Home. Only don't you think you better wait till morning? It's a private hospital, but it's awful late for visitors."

"I've got to see her," Clare said. "I couldn't sleep a wink if I didn't. I've been so worried about her."

Gretchen heaved a sigh. "Whatever you say, honey. We

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can try, anyway. Give me a second to put on a dress and I'll show you where the place is."

She led us into the darkened living room, turned the television set off and the lights on. A quart of beer, nearly full, stood on a coffee table beside the scuffed sofa. She offered me a glass, which I accepted gratefully. Clare refused. She was so tense she couldn't even sit down.

We stood and looked at each other for a minute. Then Gretchen came back, struggling with a zipper on one massive hip.

"All set, kids. You better drive, Mr. Archer. I had a couple of quarts to settle my nerves. You wouldn't believe it, but I've gained five pounds since Ethel came down here. I always gain weight when I'm anxious."

We went out to my car, and turned toward the banked lights of San Diego. The women rode in the front seat. Gretchen's opulent flesh was warm against me.

"Was Ethel here before it happened?" I said.

"Sure she was, for a day. Ethel turned up here eight or nine days ago, Tuesday of last week it was. I hadn't heard from her for several months, since she wrote me that she was going to Nevada for a divorce. It was early in the morning when she drove up—in fact, she got me out of bed. The minute I saw her, I knew that something was wrong. The poor kid was scared, really scared. She was as cold as a corpse and her teeth were chattering. So I fed her some coffee and put her in a hot tub, and after that she told me what it was that'd got her down."

"Dewar?"

"You said it, mister. Ethel never was much of a picker. When she was hostessing at the Grant coffee shop back in the old days, she was always falling for the world's worst phonies. Speaking of phonies, this Dewar takes the cake. She met him in Las Vegas when she was waiting for her divorce from Illman. He was a big promoter, to hear him tell it. She fell for the story, and she fell for him. A few days after she got her final decree, she married him. Big romance. Big deal.

"They were going to be business partners, too. He said he had some money to invest, twenty-five thousand or so, and he knew of a swell little hotel in Acapulco that they could buy at a steal for fifty thousand. The idea was that they should each put up half, and go and live in Mexico in the lap of luxury for the rest of their lives. He didn't show her any of his

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money, but she believed him. She drew her settlement money out of the bank and came to L.A. with him to close up her house and get set for the Mexican deal."

"He must have hypnotized her," Clare said. "Ethel's a smart business woman."

"Not with something tall, dark, and handsome, honey. I give him that much. He's got the looks. Well, they lived in L.A. for a couple of weeks, on Ethel's money of course, and he kept putting off the Mexican trip. He didn't want to go anywhere, in fact—just sit around the house and drink her liquor and eat her good cooking."

"He was hiding out," I said.

"From what? The police?"

"Worse than that. Some gangster pal from Nevada was gunning for him, still is. Ethel wasn't the only one he fleeced."

"Nice guy, eh? Anyway, Ethel started to get restless. She didn't like sitting around with all that money in the house, waiting for nothing. Last Monday night—a week ago Monday, that is—she had a showdown with him. Then it all came out. He didn't have any money or anything else. He wasn't a promoter, he didn't know of any hotel in Acapulco. His whole buildup was as queer as a three-dollar bill. Apparently he made his living gambling, but he was even all washed up with that. Nothing. But she was married to him now, he said, and she was going to sit still and like it or he'd knock her block off.

"He meant it, too, Ethel said. She's got the proof of it now. She waited until he drank himself to sleep that night, then she threw some things in a bag, including her twenty-five thousand, and came down here. She was on her way to get a quickie divorce in Mexico, but Jake and me talked her into staying for a while and thinking it over. Jake said she could probably get an annulment right in California, and that would be more legal."

"He was probably right."

"Yeah? Maybe it wasn't such a bright idea after all. We kept her here just long enough for Dewar to catch her. Apparently she left some letters behind and he ran down the list of her friends until he found her at our place. He talked her into going for a drive to talk it over. I didn't hear what was said—they were in her room—but he must have used some powerful persuasion. She went out of the house with him as meek as a lamb and they drove away in her car.

"That was the last I saw of her until she got in touch with

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me tonight. When she didn't come back I wanted to call the police, but Jake wouldn't let me. He said I had no business coming between a man and his wife and all that guff. I gave Jake a piece of my mind tonight on that score. I ought to've called the cops as soon as Dewar showed his sneaking face on our front porch."

"What exactly did he do to her?"

"He gave her a bad clobbering, that's obvious. Ethel didn't want to talk about it much tonight. The subject was painful to her in more ways than one."

"Did he take her money?"

"He must have. It's gone. So is he."

We were on the freeway which curved past the hills of Balboa Park. The trees of its man-made jungle were restless against the sky. Below us on the other side, the city sloped like a frozen cascade of lights down to the black concavity of the bay.

The Mission Rest Home was in the eastern suburbs, an old stucco mansion which had been converted into a private hospital. The windows in its thick stucco walls were small and barred and there were lights in some of them.

I rang the doorbell. Clare was so close to my back I could feel her breath. A woman in a purple flannelette wrapper opened the door. Her hair hung in two gray braids, which were ruler-straight. Her hard black eyes surveyed the three of us, and stayed on Gretchen.

"What is it now, Mrs. Falk?" she said brusquely.

"This is Mrs.—Miss Larrabee's sister Clare."

"Miss Larrabee is probably sleeping. She shouldn't be disturbed."

"I know it's late," Clare said in a tremulous voice. "But I've come all the way from San Francisco to see her."

"She's doing well, I assure you of that. She's completely out of danger."

"Can't I just go in for a teensy visit? Ethel will want to see me, and Mr. Archer has some questions to ask her. Mr. Archer is a private detective."

"This is very irregular." Reluctantly she opened the door. "Wait here and I'll see if she is awake. Please keep your voices down. We have other patients."

We waited in a dim high-ceilinged room which had once been the reception room of the mansion. The odors of mustiness and medication blended depressingly in the stagnant air.

"I wonder what brought her here," I said.

"She knew old lady Les

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tina," Gretchen said. "She stayed with her at one time, when Mrs. Lestina was running a boardinghouse."

"Of course," Clare said. "I remember the name. That was when Ethel was going to San Diego State. Then Daddy got killed and she had to drop out of school and go to work." Tears glimmered in her eyes. "Poor Ethel. She's always tried so hard, and been so good to me."

Gretchen patted her shoulder. "You bet she has, honey. Now you have a chance to be good to her."

"Oh, I will. I'll do everything I can."

Mrs. Lestina appeared in the arched doorway. "She's not asleep. I guess you can talk to her for a very few minutes."

We followed her to a room at the end of one wing of the house. A white-uniformed nurse was waiting at the door. "Don't say anything to upset her, will you? She's always fighting sedation as it is."

The room was large but poorly furnished, with a mirrorless bureau, a couple of rickety chairs, a brown-enameled hospital bed. The head on the raised pillow was swathed in bandages through which tufts of blonde hair were visible. The woman sat up and spread her arms. The whites of her eyes were red, suffused with blood from broken vessels. Her swollen lips opened and said, "Clare!" in a tone of incredulous joy.

The sisters hugged each other, with tears and laughter. "It's wonderful to see you," the older one said through broken teeth. "How did you get here so fast?"

"I came to stay with Gretchen. Why didn't you call me, Ethel? I've been worried sick about you."

"I'm dreadfully sorry, darling. I should have, shouldn't I? I didn't want you to see me like this. And I've been so ashamed of myself. I've been such a terrible fool. I've lost our money."

The nurse was standing against the door, torn between her duty and her feelings. "Now you promised not to get excited, Miss Larrabee."

"She's right," Clare said. "Don't give it a second thought. I'm going to leave school and get a job and look after you. You need some looking after for a change."

"Nuts. I'll be fine in a couple of weeks." The brave voice issuing from the mask was deep and vibrant. "Don't make any rash decisions, kiddo. The head is bloody but unbowed." The sisters looked at each other in the silence of deep affection.

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I stepped forward to the bedside and introduced myself. "How did this happen to you, Miss Larrabee?"

"It's a long story," she lisped, "and a sordid one."

"Mrs. Falk has told me most of it up to the point when Dewar made you drive away with him. Where did he take you?"

"To the beach—I think it was in La Jolla. It was late and there was nobody there and the tide was coming in. And Owen had a gun. I was terrified. I didn't know what more he wanted from me. He already had my twenty-five thousand."

"He had the money?"

"Yes. It was in my room at Gretchen's house. He made me give it to him before we left there. But it didn't satisfy him. He said I hurt his pride by leaving him. He said he had to satisfy his pride." Contempt ran through her voice like a thin steel thread.

"By beating you up?"

"Apparently. He hit me again and again. I think he left me for dead. When I came to, the waves were splashing on me. I managed somehow to get up to the car. It wasn't any good to me, though, because Owen had the keys. It's funny he didn't take it."

"Too easily traced," I said. "What did you do then?"

"I hardly know. I think I sat in the car for a while wondering what to do. Then a taxi went by and I stopped him and told him to bring me here."

"You weren't very wise not to call the police. They might have got your money back. Now it's a cold trail."

"Did you come here to lecture me?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean—"

"I was half crazy with pain," she said. "I hardly knew what I was doing. I couldn't bear to have anybody see me."

Her fingers were active among the folds of the sheets. Clare reached out and stroked her hands into quietness. "Now, now, darling," she crooned. "Nobody's criticizing you. You take things nice and easy for a while, and Clare will look after you."

The masked head rolled on the pillow. The nurse came forward, her face solicitous. "I think Miss Larrabee has had enough, don't you?"

She showed us out. Clare lingered with her sister for a moment, then followed us to the car. She sat between us in brooding silence all the way to Pacific Beach. Before I dropped them off at Gretchen's house, I asked for her permission to go to the police. She wouldn't give it to me, and nothing I could say would change her mind.

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I spent the rest of the night in a motor court, trying to crawl over the threshold of sleep. Shortly after dawn I disentangled myself from the twisted sheets and drove out to La Jolla.

La Jolla is a semi-detached suburb of San Diego, a small resort town half surrounded by sea. It was a gray morning. The slanting streets were scoured with the sea's cold breath, and the sea itself looked like hammered pewter.

I warmed myself with a short-order breakfast and went the rounds of the hotels and motels. No one resembling Dewar had registered in the past week. I tried the bus and taxi companies. Dewar must have slipped out of town unnoticed. But I did get a lead on the taxi driver who had taken Ethel to the Mission Rest Home. He had mentioned the injured woman to his dispatcher, and the dispatcher gave me his name and address. Stanley Simpson, 38 Calle Laureles.

Simpson was a paunchy, defeated-looking man who hadn't shaved for a couple of days. He came to the door of his tiny bungalow in his underwear, rubbing sleep out of his eyes. "What's the pitch, bub? If you got me up to try and sell me something, you're in for a disappointment."

I told him who I was and why I was there. "Do you remember the woman?"

"I hope to tell you I do. She was bleeding like a stuck pig, all over the back seat. It took me a couple of hours to clean it off. Somebody pistol-whipped her, if you ask me. I wanted to take her to the hospital, but she said no. Hell, I couldn't argue with her in that condition. Did I do wrong?"

"If you did, it doesn't matter. She's being taken good care of. I thought you might have got a glimpse of the man that did it to her."

"Not me, mister. She was all by herself, nobody else in sight. She got out of a parked car and staggered out into the road. I couldn't just leave her there, could I?"

"Of course not. You're a Good Samaritan, Simpson. Exactly where did you pick her up?"

"Down by the Cove. She was sitting in this Buick. I dropped a party off at the beach club and I was on my way back, kind of cruising along—"

"What time?"

"Around ten o'clock, I guess it was. I can check my schedule."

"It isn't important. Incidentally, did she pay you for the ride?"

"Yeah, she had a buck and

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some change in her purse. She had a hard time making it. No tip," he added gloomily.

"Tough cheese."

His fogged eyes brightened. "You're a friend of hers, aren't you? Wouldn't you say I rate a tip on a run like that? I always say, better late than never."

"Is that what you always say?" I handed him a dollar.

The Cove was a roughly semicircular inlet at the foot of a steep hill surmounted by a couple of hotels. Its narrow curving beach and the street above it were both deserted. An off-shore wind had swept away the early morning mist, but the sky was still cloudy, and the sea grim. The long swells slammed the beach like stone walls falling, and broke in foam on the rocks that framed the entrance to the Cove.

I sat in my car and watched them. I was at a dead end. This seaswept place, under this iron sky, was like the world's dead end. Far out at sea a carrier floated like a chip on the horizon. A Navy jet took off from it and scrawled tremendous nothings on the distance.

Something bright caught my eye. It was in the trough of a wave a couple of hundred yards outside the Cove. Then it was on a crest: the aluminum air-bottle of an Aqua-lung strapped to a naked brown back. Its wearer was prone on a surfboard, kicking with black-finned feet toward the shore.

He was kicking hard, and paddling with one arm, but he was making slow progress. His other arm dragged in the opaque water. He seemed to be towing something, something heavy. I wondered if he had speared a shark or a porpoise. His face was inscrutable behind his glass mask.

I left my car and climbed down to the beach. The man on the surfboard came toward me with his tiring one-armed stroke, climbing the walled waves and sliding down them. A final surge picked him up and set him on the sand, almost at my feet. I dragged his board out of the backwash and helped him to pull in the line that he was holding in one hand. His catch was nothing native to the sea. It was a man.

The end of the line was looped around his body under the armpits. He lay face down like an exhausted runner, a big man, fully clothed in soggy tweeds. I turned him over and saw the aquiline profile, the hairline mustache over the blue mouth, the dark eyes clogged with sand. Owen Dewar had made his escape by water.

The skindiver took off his mask and sat down heavily, his

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chest working like a great furred bellows. "I go down for abalone," he said between breaths. "I find this. Caught between two rocks at thirty-forty feet."

"How long has he been in the water?"

"It's hard to tell. I'd say a couple of days, anyway. Look at his color. Poor stiff. But I wish they wouldn't drown themselves in my hunting grounds."

"Do you know him?"

"Nope. Do you?"

"Never saw him before," I said, with truth.

"How about you phoning the police, Mac? I'm pooped. And unless I make a catch I don't eat today. There's no pay in fishing for corpses."

"In a minute."

I went through the dead man's pockets. There was a set of car keys in his jacket pocket and an alligator wallet on his hip. It contained no money, but the driver's license was decipherable: Owen Dewar, Mesa Court, Las Vegas. I put the wallet back, and let go of the body. The head rolled sideways. I saw the small hole in his neck, washed clean by the sea.

"Holy Mother!" the diver said. "He was shot."

I got back to the Falk house around midmorning. The sun had burned off the clouds and the day was turning hot. By daylight the long treeless street of identical houses looked cheap and rundown. It was part of the miles of suburban slums that the war had scattered all over Southern California.

Gretchen was sprinkling the brown front lawn with a desultory hose. She looked too big for the pocket-handkerchief yard. The sunsuit that barely covered her various bulges made her look even bigger. She turned off the water when I got out of my car.

"What gives? You've got trouble on your face if I ever saw trouble."

"Dewar is dead. Murdered. A skindiver found him in the sea off La Jolla."

She took it calmly. "That's not such bad news, is it? He had it coming. Who killed him?"

"I told you a gunman from Nevada was on his trail. Maybe he caught him. Anyway, Dewar was shot and bled to death from a neck wound. Then he was dumped in the ocean. I had to lay the whole thing on the line for the police, since there's murder in it."

"You told them what happened to Ethel?"

"I had to. They're at the rest home talking to her now."

"What about Ethel's money? Was the money on him?"

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"Not a trace of it. And he didn't live to spend it. The police pathologist thinks he's been dead for a week. Whoever got Dewar got the money at the same time."

"Will she ever get it back, do you think?"

"If we can catch the murderer and he still has it with him. That's a big if. Where's Clare, by the way? With her sister?"

"Clare went back to L.A."

"What for?"

"Don't ask me." She shrugged her rosy shoulders. "She got Jake to drive her down to the station before he went to work. I wasn't up. She didn't even tell me she was going." Gretchen seemed peeved.

"Did she get a telegram or a phone call?"

"Nothing. All I know is what Jake told me. She talked him into lending her ten bucks. I wouldn't mind so much, but it was all the ready cash we had, until payday. Oh, well, I guess we'll get it back, if Ethel recovers her money."

"You'll get it back," I said. "Clare seems to be a straight kid."

"That's what I always used to think. When they lived here, before Ethel met Illman and got into the chips, Clare was just about the nicest kid on the block. In spite of all the trouble in her family."

"What trouble was that?"

"Her father shot himself. Didn't you know? They said it was an accident, but the people on the street—we knew different. Mr. Larrabee was never the same after his wife left him. He spent his time brooding, drinking and brooding. Clare reminded me of him, the way she behaved last night after you left. She wouldn't talk to me or look at me. She shut herself up in her room and acted real cold. If you want the honest truth, I don't like her using my home as if it was a motel and Jake was a taxi service. The least she could of done was say goodbye to me."

"It sounds as if she had something on her mind."

All the way back to Los Angeles I wondered what it was. It took me a little over two hours to drive from San Diego to West Hollywood. The black Lincoln with the searchlight and the Nevada license plates was standing at the curb below the redwood house. The front door of the house was standing open.

I transferred my automatic from the suitcase to my jacket pocket, making sure that it was ready to fire. I climbed the terraced lawn beside the driveway. My feet made no sound in

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the grass. When I reached the porch I heard voices from inside. One was the gunman's hoarse and deathly monotone.

"I'm taking it, sister. It belongs to me."

"You're a liar."

"Sure, but not about this. The money is mine."

"It's my sister's money. What right have you got to it?"

"This. Dewar stole it from me. He ran a poker game for me in Vegas, a high-stakes game in various hotels around town. He was a good dealer and I trusted him with the house take. I let it pile up for a week, that was my mistake. I should've kept a closer watch on him. He ran out on me with twenty-five grand or more. That's the money you're holding, lady."

"I don't believe it. You can't prove that story. It's fantastic."

"I don't have to prove it. Gelt talks, but iron talks louder. So hand it over, eh?"

"I'll die first."

"Maybe you will at that."

I edged along the wall to the open door. Clare was standing flat against the opposite wall of the hallway. She was clutching a sheaf of bills to her breast. The gunman's broad flannel back was to me, and he was advancing on her.

"Stay away from me, you." Her cry was thin and desperate. She was trying to merge with the wall, pressed by terror.

"I don't like taking candy from a baby," he said in a very reasonable tone. "Only I'm going to have that money back."

"You can't have it. It's Ethel's. It's all she has."

He raised his armed right hand and slapped the side of her face with the gun barrel, lightly. Fingering the welt it left, she said in a kind of despairing stupor, "You're the one that hurt Ethel, aren't you? Now you're hurting me. You like hurting people, don't you?"

"Listen to reason, lady. It ain't just the money, it's a matter of business. I let it happen once, it'll happen again. I can't afford to let anybody get away with nothing. I got a reputation to live up to."

I said from the doorway, "Is that why you killed Dewar?"

He let out an animal sound and whirled in my direction. I shot before he did, twice. The first slug rocked him back on his heels. His bullet went wild, plowed the ceiling. My second slug took him off balance and slammed him against the wall. His blood spattered Clare and the money in her hands. She screamed once, very loudly.

The man from Las Vegas dropped his gun. It clattered on the parquetry. His hands

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clasped his perforated chest, trying to hold the blood in. He slid down the wall slowly, his face a mask of smiling pain, and sat with a bump on the floor. He blew red bubbles and said, "You got me wrong. I didn't kill Dewar. I didn't know he was dead. The money belongs to me. You made a big mistake, punk."

"So did you."

He went on smiling, as if in fierce appreciation of the joke. Then his red grin changed to a rictus, and he slumped sideways.

Clare looked from him to me, her eyes wide and dark with the sight of death. "I don't know how to thank you. He was going to kill me."

"I doubt that. He was just combining a little pleasure with business."

"But he shot at you."

"It's just as well he did. It leaves no doubt that it was self-defense."

"Is it true what you said? That Dewar's dead? He killed him?"

"You tell me."

"What do you mean?"

"You've got the money that Dewar took from your sister. Where did you get it?"

"It was here, in the house. I found it in the kitchen."

"That's kind of hard to swallow, Clare."

"It's true." She looked down at the blood-spattered money in her hands. The outside bill was a hundred. Unconsciously she tried to wipe it clean on the front of her dress. "He had it hidden here. He must have come back and hid it."

"Show me where."

"You're not being very nice to me. And I'm not feeling well."

"Neither is Dewar. You didn't shoot him yourself, by any chance?"

"How could I? I was in Berkeley when it happened. I wish I was back there now."

"You know when it happened, do you?"

"No." She bit her lip. "I don't mean that. I mean I was in Berkeley all along. You're a witness, you were with me on the train coming down."

"Trains run both ways."

She regarded me with loathing. "You're not nice at all. To think that yesterday I thought you were nice."

"You're wasting time, Clare. I have to call the police. But first I want to see where you found the money. Or where you say you did."

"In the kitchen. You've got to believe me. It took me a long time to get here from the station on the bus. I'd only just found it when he walked in on me."

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"I'll believe the physical evidence, if any."

To my surprise the physical evidence was there. A red-enameled flour canister was standing open on the board beside the kitchen sink. There were fingerprints on the flour and a floury piece of oilskin wrapping in the sink.

"He hid the money under the flour," Clare said. "I guess he thought it would be safer here than if he carried it around with him."

It wasn't a likely story. On the other hand, the criminal mind is capable of strange things. Whose criminal mind, I wondered: Clare's or Owen Dewar's or somebody else's?

"Where did you get the bright idea of coming back here and looking for it?"

"Ethel suggested it last night, just before I left her. She told me this was his favorite hiding place while she was living with him. She discovered it by accident one day."

"Hiding place for what?"

"Some kind of drug he took. He was a drug addict. Do you still think I'm lying?"

"Somebody is. But I suppose I've got to take your word until I get something better. What are you going to do with the money?"

"Ethel said if I found it, that I was to put it in the bank."

"There's no time for that now. You better let me hold it for you. I have a safe in my office."

"No. You don't trust me. Why should I trust you?"

"Because you can trust me, and you know it. If the cops impound it you'll have to prove ownership to get it back."

She was too spent to argue She let me take it out of her hands. I riffled through the bills and got a rough idea of their sum. There was easily twenty-five thousand there. I gave her a receipt for that amount and put the sheaf of bills in my inside pocket.

It was after dark when the cops got through with me. By that time I was equipped to do a comparative study on the San Diego and Los Angeles P.D.'s. With the help of a friend in the D.A.'s office, Clare's eyewitness account, and the bullet in the ceiling, I got away from them without being booked.

The dead man's record also helped. He had been widely suspected of shooting Bugsy Siegel, and had fallen heir to some of Siegel's holdings. His name was Jack Fidelis. R.I.P.

I drove out Sunset to my office. The Strip was lighting up for business again. The stars looked down on its neon conflagration like hard bright

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knowing eyes. I pulled the Venetian blinds and locked the doors and counted the money: $26,380.

I wrapped it up in brown paper, sealed it with wax, and tucked it away in the safe. I would have preferred to tear it in little pieces and flush the green confetti down the drain. Two men had died for it. I wasn't eager to become the third.

I had a steak in the restaurant at International Airport, then hopped a shuttle plane to Las Vegas. There I spent a rough night in various gambling joints, watching the suckers blow their vacation money, pinching my own pennies, and talking to some of the guys and girls that raked the money in. The rest of Illman's two hundred dollars bought me the facts I needed.

I flew back to Los Angeles in the morning, picked up my car, and headed for San Diego. I was tired enough to sleep standing up, like a horse. But something heavier than sleep or tiredness sat on the back of my neck and pressed the gas pedal down to the floorboards. It was the thought of Clare.

Clare was with her sister in the Mission Rest Home. She was waiting outside the closed door of Ethel's room when Mrs. Lestina took me down the hall. She looked as if she had passed a rougher night than mine. Her grooming was careless, hair uncombed, mouth unpainted. The welt from Fidelis' gun had turned blue and spread to one puffed eye. And I thought how very little it took to break a young girl down into a tramp, if she was vulnerable, or twist her into something worse than a tramp.

"Did you bring it with you?" she said as soon as Mrs. Lestina was out of earshot. "Ethel's angry with me for turning it over to you."

"I'm not surprised."

"Give it to me. Please." Her hand clawed at my sleeve. "Isn't that what you came for, to give it back to me?"

"It's in the safe in my office in Los Angeles. That is, if you're talking about the money."

"What else would I be talking about? You'll simply have to go back there and get it. Ethel can't leave here without it. She needs to pay her bill."

"Is Ethel planning to go some place?"

"I persuaded her to come back to Berkeley with me. She'll have better care in the hospital there, and I know of a good plastic surgeon—"

"It'll take more than that to put Ethel back together again."

"What do you mean?"

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"You should be able to guess. You're not a stupid girl, or are you? Has she got you fooled the way she had me fooled?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. But I don't like it. Every time I see you, you seem to get nastier."

"This is a nasty business. It's rubbing off on all of us, isn't it, kid?"

She looked at me vaguely through a fog of doubt. "Don't you dare call me kid. I thought you were a real friend for a while, but you don't even like me. You've said some dreadful things. You probably think you can scare me into letting you keep our money. Well, you can't."

"That's my problem," I said. "What to do with the money."

"You'll give it back to Ethel and me, that's what you'll do. There are laws to deal with people like you—"

"And people like Ethel. I want to talk to her."

"I won't let you. My sister's suffered enough already."

She spread her arms across the width of the door. I was tempted to go away and send her the money and forget the whole thing. But the need to finish it pushed me, imperative as a gun at my back.

I lifted her by the waist and tried to set her aside. Her entire body was rigid and jerking galvanically. Her hands slid under my arms and around my neck and held on. Her head rolled on my shoulder and was still.

Suddenly, like delayed rain after lightning, her tears came. I stood and held her vibrating body, trying to quench the dangerous heat that was rising in my veins, and wondering what the hell I was going to do.

"Ethel did it for me," she sobbed. "She wanted me to have a good start in life."

"Some start she's giving you. Did she tell you that?"

"She didn't have to. I knew. I tried to pretend to myself, but I knew. When she told me where to look for the money last night—the night before last."

"You knew Ethel took it from Dewar and hid it in her house?"

"Yes. The thought went through my mind and I couldn't get rid of it. Ethel's always taken terrible chances, and money means so much to her. Not for herself. For me."

"She wasn't thinking of you when she gambled away the money she got from Illman. She went through it in a week."

"Is that what happened to it?"

"That's it. I flew to Las Vegas last night and talked to

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some of the people that got her money, dealers and stickmen. They remembered her. She had a bad case of gambling fever that week. It didn't leave her until the money was gone. Then maybe she thought of you."

"Poor Ethel. I've seen her before when she had a gambling streak."

"Poor Dewar," I said.

The door beside us creaked open. The muzzle of a blue revolver looked out. Above it Ethel's eyes glared red from her bandaged face.

"Come in here, both of you."

Clare stretched out her hands towards her sister. "No, Ethel. Darling, you mustn't. Give me that gun."

"I have a use for it. I know what I'm doing."

She backed away, supporting herself on the doorknob.

I said to Clare, "We better do as she says. She won't hurt you."

"Nor you unless you make me. Don't reach for your gun, and don't try anything funny. You know what happened to Dewar."

"Not as well as you do."

"Don't waste any tears on that one. Save them for yourself. Now get in here." The gun wagged peremptorily.

I edged past her with Clare at my back. Ethel shut the door and moved to the bed, her eyes never leaving mine. She sat on its edge and supported the elbow of her gun arm on her knee, hunched far over like an aged wreck of a woman.

It was strange to see the fine naked legs dangling below her hospital gown, the red polish flaking off her toenails. Her voice was low and resonant.

"I don't like to do this. But how am I going to make you see it my way if I don't? I want Clare to see it, too. It was self-defense, understand. I didn't intend to kill him. I never expected to see him again. Fidelis was after him and it was only a matter of time until he caught up with Owen. Owen knew that. He told me himself he wouldn't live out the year. He was so sure of it he was paralyzed. He got so he wouldn't even go out of the house.

"Somebody had to make a move, and I decided it might as well be me. Why should I sit and wait for Fidelis to come and take the money back and blow Owen's head off for him? It was really my money, anyway, mine and Clare's."

"Leave me out of this," Clare said.

"But you don't understand, honey," the damaged mouth insisted. "It really was my money. We were legally mar-

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ried, so what was his was mine. I talked him into taking it in the first place. He'd never have had the guts to do it alone. He thought Fidelis was God himself. I didn't. But I didn't want to be there when Jack Fidelis found him. So I left him.

"I took the money out of his pillow when he was asleep and hid it where he'd never look for it. Then I drove down here. I guess you know the rest. He found a letter from Gretchen in the house and traced me through it. He thought I was carrying the money. When it turned out that I wasn't, he took me out to the beach and beat me up. I wouldn't tell him where it was. He threatened to shoot me then. I fought him for the gun and it went off. It was a clear case of self-defense."

"Maybe it was. You'll never get a jury to believe it, though. Innocent people don't dump their shooting victims in the drink."

"But I didn't. The tide was coming in. I didn't even touch him after he died. He just lay there and the water took him."

"While you stood and watched?"

"I couldn't get away. I was so weak I couldn't move for a long time. Then when I finally could, it was too late. He was gone, and he had the keys to the car."

"He drove you out to La Jolla, did he?"

"Yes."

"And held a gun on you at the same time. That's quite a trick."

"He did, though," she said. "That is the way it happened."

"I hear you telling me, Mrs. Dewar."

She winced behind her mask at the sound of her name. "I'm not Mrs. Dewar," she said. "I've taken back my maiden name. I'm Ethel Larrabee."

"We won't argue about the name. You'll be trading it in for a number, anyway."

"I don't think I will. The shooting was self-defense, and once he was dead the money belonged to me. There's no way of proving he stole it, now that Fidelis is gone. I guess I owe you a little thanks for that."

"Put down your gun, then."

"I'm not that grateful," she said.

Clare moved across the room toward her. "Let me look at the gun, Ethel. It's father's revolver, isn't it?"

"Be quiet, you little fool."

"I won't be quiet. These things have to be said. You're way off by yourself, Ethel, I'm not with you. I want no part of this, or the money. You don't understand how strange and dreadful—"

Her voice broke. She stood a

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few feet from her sister, held back by the gun's menace, yet strongly drawn toward it. "That's father's revolver, isn't it? The one he shot himself with?"

"What if it is?"

"I'll tell you, Ethel Larrabee," I said. "Dewar didn't pull a gun on you. You were the one that had the gun. You forced him to drive you out to the beach and shot him in cold blood. But he didn't die right away. He lived long enough to leave his marks on you. Isn't that how it happened?"

The bandaged face was silent. I looked into the terrible eyes for assent. They were lost and wild, like an animal's.

"Is that true, Ethel? Did you murder him?" Clare looked down at her sister with pity and terror.

"I did it for you," the masked face said. "I always tried to do what was best for you. Don't you believe me? Don't you know I love you? Ever since father killed himself I've tried—"

Clare turned and walked to the wall and stood with her forehead against it. Ethel put the muzzle of the gun in her mouth. Her broken teeth clenched on it the way a smoker bites on a pipestem. The bone and flesh of her head muffled its roar.

I laid her body out on the bed and pulled a sheet up over it.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Any such blood-and-thunder enthusiast as your obedient servant, after occupying his rostrum for almost four years, will have developed certain beliefs which might better be called superstitions. Month after month he sees inexorably approaching the deadline when copy must be delivered, although the postman has brought no new book he can recommend.

And yet, as a rule, all goes well. Though worthy items may arrive only days or even hours before deadline, they always seem to appear in time. Nevertheless, the critic can't help wondering what must be his course if luck runs out with no good book at all.

"It's all very well," our poor wight reminds himself, "to say you'll celebrate some acknowledged masterpiece from the past. This sort of thing, remember, has happened before. At various times, desperate, you've reviewed the complete Sherlock Holmes; you've reviewed both *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*; you've reviewed the complete Father Brown. There's bound to be an end of this game. How many masterpieces are left?"

Well, your mentor is not defeated. I can still name one mystery-monger who meets every test. He wrote classic detection; he wrote honest thrill; and, though as his medium he chose the short story rather than the novel, he created not one picturesque detective, but five of them. Perhaps his identity has occurred to you. If not, I hold him in reserve for the future.

Though this month I feared I must quote my author-in-reserve, the rescuing cavalry galloped up. They brought one outstanding new detective novel; two paperback reprints—one detection, the other mystery-adventure—more than deserving attention; and, to buttress all three, a literally full-blooded study in murder which adds one or two footnotes to history.

Whether you are connoisseur or casual reader, you must not miss *The Japanese Mistress*, by Richard Neely (Saturday Review Press, $5.95). Young Scott Welles, attached to the American army

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in Japan after World War II, has found an idyllic interlude with the girl who fulfilled his dreams. Middle-aged Scott Welles, in San Francisco twenty years later, still muddles through an uneven marriage to neurotic Tina, his wife before the Japanese interlude.

Scott may well have brought his exotic mistress to America. Trouble explodes in murder; Tina is battered to death amid multiple motives; and what *did* the adopted daughter see?

Mr. Neely has done other work besides detection, but at detection he takes no second place. As fiendishly ingenious as it is well written, *The Japanese Mistress*, with at least one stunner of a shock at the finale, is the best mystery I have read this year.

Some Buried Caesar, by Rex Stout (Pyramid, 75¢), finds Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin at one of the fancier farm expositions in upstate New York. Wolfe, who has come to display orchids, remains (at a price) to display his detective talents.

The feud between two domineering landowners, aristocratic old Osgood and grab-everything millionaire Pratt of Pratteria Restaurants, now centers round a prize bull called Hickory Caesar Grindon. As a gesture of contempt for Osgood, Pratt has bought this costly animal to slaughter and eat it at a barbecue. Osgood's son, after betting that Pratt will never barbecue Hickory Caesar, is found messily slain in the bull's pasture. Though written many years ago, the story retains all its vigor, its freshness, its expertise: one more triumph for the beer-and-orchid sage.

Against the background of a Caribbean island, with civil war aboil and even worse dangers swooping near, *Wyatt's Hurricane*, by Desmond Bagley (Pyramid, $1.25), flings us at once into headlong adventure as Meteorologist Dave Wyatt and Julie, the enticing air-hostess, struggle towards high ground before Hurricane Mabel shall rip apart earth and sea alike. Convincing, with every page a new excitement, unhesitatingly recommended.

Dominant in blood-reek throughout Jean Plaidy's fact-historical novel, *Murder Most Royal* (Putnam, $7.95), towers bloated, swaggering, all-powerful King Henry VIII. One wife he divorced; one, Anne of Cleves, he shuffled aside; one died after childbirth; two were executed; the last and most fortunate outlived him.

He murdered Anne Boleyn, whose family had spelled their name plain Bullen; he murdered gentle Catherine Howard; but he slew both according to his own laws. How he killed them, since no British parliament yet dared defy the king, is told in this chronicle of splendor and squalor: ironic, but always of absorbing interest.

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another pastiche of PHILO VANCE by JON L. BREEN

There are several reasons for the writing of pastiches, which are sincerer forms of flattery than even the lightest-hearted and best-intentioned parodies. First, of course, pastiches are obviously gestures of respect and admiration (if not of love) for the originals. Second, in cases where the original authors have died (S. S. Van Dine, Earl Derr Biggers) pastiches give us new adventures, otherwise unattainable, of our favorite fictional detectives. Third — and perhaps this is the most important reason of all — pastiches are likely to send us to the original stories, to reread them, or if we have never read them before, to introduce us to the genuine article.

Here, then, is another "hitherto unrecorded account of one of Philo Vance's greatest triumphs" — with a main clue (beware!) that is the right "McWright," the real McDine"...

CHARACTERS OF THE STORY

PHILO VANCE
PHINEAS CIRCLE
A millionaire sportsman.
FRANCES CIRCLE
His wife.
SAMUEL CIRCLE
His son.
ARNOLD CRAMER
A horseman.
GIFFORD WHITE
A horse trainer.
HENRY GILFOYLE
An attorney.
TREE
The Circle butler.

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ERNEST HEATH
Sergeant of the Homicide Bureau.
JOHN F.-X. MARKHAM
District Attorney of New York County.

THE CIRCLE MURDER CASE

by JON L. BREEN

A half-dozen years ago, a grey stallion named Shyster died of a heart attack at the age of 33 at Willowtree Farm near Lexington, Kentucky. Since the aged steed had never been highly successful on the track and had proven an indifferent sire, it may have been surmised that attaining the venerable age of 33 was the most remarkable achievement of an uneventful career. This assumption, however, would prove too hasty. For although the meager accounts in the racing press of Shyster's passing did not mention the fact—understandably, since the whole truth has never been known until now—the horse was a key element in the solution of one of the most baffling crimes of the thirties, the Circle Murder Case.

Philo Vance, it will be recalled, * was a racing enthusiast at one time, even owning several good horses in the middle twenties. Though Vance eventually lost interest in turf affairs—after a broken leg necessitated the humane destruction of one of his best runners—few men in New York at that time had as prodigious a knowledge of the sport and its history as did Vance. It was for this reason that John F.-X. Markham, District Attorney of New York County and an old friend of Vance, sought his help in investigating the murder of Phineas Circle, the millionaire sportsman.

"You know the basic facts, Vance?" asked Markham, sipping a glass of cognac in the library of Vance's East 38th Street apartment.

"If the newsboys printed the basic facts, I know 'em," drawled Vance, "but experience assures me they probably haven't, except in distorted form."

*S. S. Van Dine's *The Garden Murder Case* (Scribners, 1935).

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"I'll start from the beginning then. Phineas Circle, millionaire sportsman and patron of the arts—"

"My dear Markham, the newsboys told me he was a millionaire sportsman and a patron of the arts, and I knew that anyway, though I'm sure not sure it captures the essence of his *persona.* I also know he was found dead late last night, stabbed in the back with our old friend the Oriental letter-opener, * and that his body was found in our other old friend the library, of the non-public sort. I also know that there were 'no clues,' meanin' of course you didn't choose to tell the scribes about any. That's the extent of my knowledge, leavin' out the usual lurid journalistic innuendo. Now, rather than startin' from the tired old beginning, let's start from there."

Markham glowered at his friend. "You seem a little testy, if I may say so, Vance. If you aren't interested, say so."

Vance lit a *Regie*, sighed, and blew a wreath of smoke toward the ceiling. "Oh, my aunt! I'm frightfully interested, old boy. I'm fightin' boredom and need some intellectual exercise. Van can tell you how deuced restless I've been. Even re-translatin' Menander hasn't been able to defeat the old doldrums. It'll take a murder to do that. So get on with the story."

"Very well. I don't know how well you knew Phineas Circle, Vance, but one way he stayed so wealthy was by never betting on horse races. Of course, he owned a large stable and was deeply involved in the sport, but he never placed a bet. He did, however, take some pride in his ability as a handicapper. He made selections but only backed them with imaginary money."

"Most inter'stin'. Many well-heeled chappies of my acquaintance frequent the two-dollar windows only, but Circle never bet at all, eh? And yet he picked the horses?"

"Religiously. Every evening a special messenger would deliver a copy of the next day's racing paper. It was Circle's habit to enter his library after dinner and go over the next day's races, picking a winner in each race and circling his selection with a red pencil. He was engaged in this activity when he was murdered.

*The weapon in question was highly similar in its design to the letter-opener used in the murder of musical comedy star, Jack Austin (*The Austin Murder Case*, EQMM, December 1967). However, whereas Austin's letter-opener was a genuine Chinese artifact, Circle's was a replica, thus reversing the artistic differences that might ordinarily have been anticipated. A fuller discussion of the subject may be found in Vance's monograph, *Oriental Letter-Openers As Murder Weapons*, now out of print.

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"Normally, no one disturbed Circle while he was at his handicapping, but this particular evening he had three visitors: his lawyer, Henry Gilfoyle; his trainer, Gifford White; and another horse-owner, Arnold Cramer. They all claim to have left him alive. They visited him in the order named, but that's not too significant since they all had the opportunity to re-enter the library at any time later.

"There were three other people in the house at the time of the killing: his wife Frances, his son Samuel, and Tree, the butler. Whether any of those three also entered the library that evening we don't know. They say not.

"We're sure the killer was known to him. Circle sat at his desk facing the door. The murderer had to enter there, pick up the letter-opener from the desk, walk around behind Circle, and stab him—all while Circle sat calmly perusing his racing paper. Circle must have trusted the killer. He wasn't expecting violence."

"In the manner of up-to-date assassins, I suppose the miscreant left no prints."

"Not on the weapon, and of course prints anywhere else would have little significance. No, the killer seemed to have left no clues, though we're pretty sure it must have been either one of his three visitors or a member of his household. The only possible clue came from the victim himself. Apparently after being stabbed he didn't die immediately. He made one last mark on his racing sheet—he circled the past-performance chart of a horse named Shyster, running today in the third race at Rivermont."

"How do we know he did it after he was stabbed?" asked Vance.

"The circle is very shaky, as if made with a great effort, and inasmuch as I hardly think he was interested in handicapping in his dying moments, we have surmised he was trying to tell us something."

"Such as who did him in, what?"

"Exactly."

"And you've brought along the past-performance chart, I hope?"

Markham drew a slip of paper out of his pocket and handed it to Vance. It was a clipping from the racing press.

"This is not from Circle's copy, of course," said Markham, "but it's identical. The original is at headquarters."

"Quite," said Vance, and for some moments he stared at the

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chart intently. Then he asked, "He drew his shaky red circle around the whole chart, did he? Not just a part of it?"

"That's right."

"My dear boy, I see oodles of hypotheses here."

"Oodles," agreed Markham sourly. "That's the whole trouble. It seems to point to everybody. If he meant just one of the clues in that chart, how are we supposed to determine which one?"

Vance passed the clipping over to me. "Know how to read these things, Van?"

SHYSTER'S PAST PERFORMANCES AS MARKED BY PHINEAS CIRCLE

SHYSTER 114. Gr. c. 4, by Higher Court-Our Fran by Frank J.
Owner, Willowtree Farm; Trainer, J. Arnow; Breeder, A. Cramer
193- 15 2 6 1 $1,640
193- 3 M 1 1 75 3,500

Nov 4[6]	Riv	6F	1:11-1ft	9-5▲	114	$12^{11}\frac{1}{2}$	1^{hd}	3^{2}		Rudolph J[4]		3,500
Oct19[6]	Riv	7F	1:25gd	3-2▲	117	$14^{1}\frac{1}{2}$	4^{4}	7^{9}		Rudolph J[9]		6,500
Oct12[4]	Riv	6F	1:10ft	2	114	11^{12}	1^{hd}	2^{no}		Rudolph J[5]		7,500
Oct 1[5]	Riv	1	1:38-1ft	7-2▲	114	14^{21}	5^{6}	9^{10}		Andrews C[3]		8,000
Sep25[7]	Riv	6F	1:11-3ft	2▲	112	$2^{\frac{1}{2}}11\frac{1}{2}$	11^{4}	8^{3}		Andrews C[1]		Alw
Sep20[7]	Riv	6F	1:13gd	33	114	14^{13}	12^{2}	$2\frac{1}{2}^{2}$		Andrews C[4]		Alw
Aug14[7]	MM	1¼	2:05ft	4-5▲	121	13^{12}	2^{2}	5^{5}		Carlyle E[6]		Hcp S
Aug 7[7]	MM	1	1:37-1ft	2▲	122	11^{12}	1^{5}	1^{3}		Carlyle E[1]		Hcp O
Jul19[7]	MM	6F	1:12ft	1	124	2^{hd}	33^{46}	8^{8}		Carlyle E[4]		Hcp S

Author's note: Horse-racing enthusiasts will realize that the above is not a full past-performance chart, but it contains all the information Philo Vance needed to discover who Phineas Circle was trying to incriminate in his dying moments.

I have little background in horse racing and so confessed it was just a series of meaningless words and numbers to me.

"Well, the animal's name is Shyster. In the race in question, which I imagine is being run about now, he has been assigned by the track handicapper to carry a weight of 114 pounds. He's a grey colt, four years old, sired by Higher Court. The mater's name is Our Fran, and she's a daughter of Frank J., a good runner of a few years back.

"This season, Shyster has started in fifteen races, winnin' two for a total of $1,640 in earnings. He's entered for a claiming price of $3,500. That simply means any owner who's started a runner at this meetin' can buy him for that price by puttin' in a claim before the start of the race.

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"Shyster last ran November 4 in the sixth at Rivermont. It was a six-furlong race and the winner's time was one minute, eleven and one-fifth seconds, a very good time for this class of horse. Shyster was 9-5 in the betting and was the favourite. He carried 114, same as to-day. At the first call, he was in front by two lengths, and he stayed in front at the next two calls; but at the finish he'd dropped back to third, two lengths off the winner.

"His jockey was Joe Rudolph and they started from the Number Four post position. He was entered to be claimed for $3,500, same as to-day. You can see he'd been dropping in class, and earlier in the year he was running in stakes and allowance races. He ran his last six races at Rivermont, but before that he'd been at Mountain Meadows, a small track out west. Got that, Van?"

I nodded, though a bit dazedly.

Vance turned back to Markham. "Do the six suspects know anything about this clue?"

"No, of course not."

"I think they ought to, Markham, old dear. I'd like to buzz on over to the Circle manse and interview the household. Could you arrange for the three visitors to drop by there, too? I'd like to know what they think of this little message from the grave, as it were."

"Do you think it's wise, Vance?"

"Wise or not, it should be jolly stimulatin', eh, what?"

"Have it your way, Vance," said the D.A. resignedly.

We interviewed the suspects in the Circle library, Vance sitting at the very desk where Phineas Circle's body had been found the night before. A feeling of gloom pervaded the atmosphere, but the mystery so stimulated Vance he seemed positively ebullient. We first talked to Tree, the Circle butler, a tall, bald, and taciturn individual whose Brooklyn accent somewhat neutralized the effect of his dignified demeanour.

"How long have you been in Mr. Circle's employ, Tree?"

"Twenty-five years, sir."

"Was he an easy man to work for?"

"He was always kind and generous to me, sir."

"Any thoughts on why he might have been murdered?"

"He made enemies, sir, as rich men do, but I can't think of anything specific."

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"Was Arnold Cramer one of those enemies by any chance?"

"It's hard to say, sir. They were friends for some years, but Mr. Cramer was unhappy about some of the transactions between them involving horses. He was often angry, but I couldn't say he was an enemy of Mr. Circle's."

Vance handed the past-performance chart to Tree, explained the circumstances, and asked the butler for his feelings about it.

Tree smiled slightly. "Well, sir, the name of the horse would seem to point to Mr. Gilfoyle, who was Mr. Circle's lawyer. Not that Mr. Gilfoyle is a shyster, but that is a term that sometimes is applied to lawyers."

"Quite," agreed Vance. "But don't you see other possible meanings? Couldn't it point to someone else?"

Tree, seeming uncomfortable, was silent.

"Could it point to you, Tree?" asked Vance bluntly. "Look at the name of the owner."

"Willowtree Farm, yes, sir. My first name is not Willow, sir."

"What is it?"

"William, sir."

"That *is* rather close, Tree. Middle name?"

The butler swallowed hard. "Orville."

"William Orville Tree. Will O. Tree. Most inter'stin'."

Now the butler's bald head was gleaming with perspiration. "But a bit far-fetched, sir?" he offered with humourous discomfort.

Vance laughed. "'Pon my soul, quite so, Tree. That'll do, I think. Could I see your mistress, please?"

Tree's head jerked up with a start. Then he realized Vance meant Mrs. Circle. His butler's façade seemed demolished, however, and we could see him working hard to repair it before he left the library.

Frances Circle was a good deal younger than her late husband. She was very attractive and vibrant and not at all grief-stricken. As Sergeant Ernest Heath of Homicide had told us when we arrived at the Circle home, "She married the old coot for his money, and he didn't die fast enough. He may have been a shrivelled old man, but it was a healthy kind of shrivel."

Vance asked her about her husband's enemies and she mentioned several, though none from the circle of suspects we were concentrating on. She agreed Arnold Cramer had been

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displeased with some of the deals he'd made with Circle—in fact, he had occasionally accused Circle of trying to swindle him.

Handed the chart of the horse Shyster, she became flustered for the first time.

"I don't see anything here, Mr. Vance. I don't understand what it could mean."

"The horse's name, Mrs. Circle. Shyster. Doesn't that suggest anyone?"

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about, Mr. Vance," she protested shrilly, "and I'll have you know Mr. Gilfoyle is a very good and honest lawyer!"

As if in answer to a theatrical cue, Henry Gilfoyle stormed into the library. A big, strongly-built man, he had gotten past the surprised officer stationed outside the door. Sergeant Heath entered the library to help restrain the angry lawyer, a black-haired and handsome man with a pencil-thin moustache.

"Are they badgering you, Fran? I don't think the widow of the murdered man should be subjected to harassment!"

"Good day, Mr. Gilfoyle," said Vance languidly. "Most convenient you should join us at this juncture, y'know. Phineas Circle left us a little message before he died. Wonder if you can make anything out of it."

The lawyer looked at the clipping and became even more enraged. "I didn't come here to be insulted!" he roared.

"I dare say not. You came here to make an ass of yourself," murmured Vance.

Sergeant Heath insinuated himself between them, and Vance was saved the indignity of having to defend himself.

"I know what you're thinking, Vance," said Gilfoyle more calmly. "Shyster could mean lawyer. So he's saying, 'Gilfoyle killed me.' Well, I didn't. But he knew I intended to marry Fran if and when he finally kicked off, and I guess he couldn't stand for me to have her. So he decided to frame me."

"He didn't stab himself in the back, counsellor," Heath pointed out.

"No, but he was more interested in incriminating me than in telling who really killed him."

"There's another possibility, Mr. Gilfoyle," said Vance almost listlessly. "The dam of the horse is named Our Fran."

Fran Circle uttered an involuntary squeal.

"Or maybe they were in it together," Heath offered.

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"And maybe not," said Vance, his voice suddenly brisk. "Remove this emotional couple, Sergeant, and let me talk to the son."

Samuel Circle was a slight young man of about thirty with a weak chin and a perpetually-defeated expression. He was, obviously, not Fran Circle's son but a product of Phineas Circle's first marriage.

"My father was a tyrant," he said simply. "A kind man when he wanted to be, a generous one to me I must admit, but still a tyrant."

"Did anyone hate him enough to kill him?"

"Lots."

"Did you speak with him last evening?"

"No, I didn't. I never disturbed him while he was handicapping the horses."

Vance produced the clipping and passed it to young Circle, who studied it with some interest. "I remember this horse. He ran at Mountain Meadows. I had a job in the publicity department there this last summer. Till I got fired."

"Did you have any prior experience in publicity?"

"No, I'd never achieved failure in that particular field before. My father thought I'd be good at it because I wrote some pretty good sonnets when I was in school."

"Tut! Tut! Mr. Circle. The connection is a bit tenuous, eh, what?"

"I know, but he was desperate. Ever since I flunked out of law school, he's been trying to find a niche for me. The racing secretary at Mountain Meadows is an old friend of his, so he got me the job."

"Do many Mountain Meadows horses run at Rivermont, Mr. Circle?"

The young man smiled. "No, not many. Rivermont is big time, and Mountain Meadows is strictly minor league. I'll bet Shyster's the only Mountain Meadows horse to run at Rivermont this season."

Vance indicated that would be all. After Circle had left, Markham told us, "That young man was graduated from prep school at the top of his class. He was the junior D.A. on Youth-in-Government Day. I can't imagine what has happened to him."

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"I'd like to see the trainer now," said Vance.

Gifford White was a silent but amiable man with grey hair and an unwrinkled ruddy face that belied his sixty-nine years. Throughout their interview he looked Vance squarely in the eye.

"How long had you been trainin' for Mr. Circle, Mr. White?" asked Vance.

"Fifteen years."

"He had a good many fine horses in that time."

"Yes. Especially Cliff House. * He was the best I ever saddled, Mr. Vance."

"Yes, of course, I remember him well."

"I remember your own horse, Mr. Vance, Magic Mirror. He could have been a great one."

"Kind of you to say so, Mr. White. What did you and Mr. Circle talk about last night?"

"Just the horses. Which we'd run and where and so forth. The usual thing."

"Any harsh words between you?"

"No, we got along fine all the time I worked for him."

"Who do you think dispatched the old boy?"

"No idea."

Vance showed the old trainer Shyster's past-performance chart and solicited his comments.

White chuckled. "He's saying I did it."

Vance looked puzzled. "Fancy, now! So far as I can see, you're the only suspect who has no connnection with this chart. Where's the link?"

"Shyster's a grey horse, Mr. Vance. Actually he's a very light grey, nearly white. Of course, there's no such thing as a white thoroughbred,† but greys are the closest thing. And my name's White, so he must have been pointing to me."

"You're havin' a good time with us, Mr. White. Surely the indications of certain other people are much stronger. The lawyer, for example, Mr. Gilfoyle."

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*Cliff House was only the fourth best 3-year-old of 1931, but the other three were Twenty Grand, Equipoise, and Mate.

†In the troubling sixties, even this comforting truism fell by the wayside. In 1963, two white thoroughbreds were foaled, one in France and one in Kentucky.

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"Shyster. Yes, I see. I don't like to gossip, Mr. Vance."

"This is a murder investigation, Mr. White," said Markham. "It's evidence rather than gossip."

"It's gossip," said Gifford White stubbornly. "But if you insist, I'll gossip. Gilfoyle will marry Fran as soon as they figure it's in good taste. That's no secret in the racing world. Unless—"

"Unless one or both are on trial for murder!" said Vance sharply. "Most helpful, Mr. White. Thank you."

After White had left, Markham said, "Vance, I don't know why you're neglecting the timetable: who entered the library when and all that sort of thing."

"Borin' work, Markham. It's the psychology of the murdered man that intrigues me. And of the murderer. Besides, you and Heath have gotten all the mileage you can out of the timetable, haven't you? If there were anything there, you'd have seen it, wouldn't you? You chaps aren't stupid."

"Dammit, Vance, we are too! Dashiell Hammett said so, and I'm inclined to believe him.* It's most unlike you to be so trusting of police procedure, Vance. It worries me. There's an election coming up, and I—"

"Oh, my Aunt Agatha! Let's see the Cramer chappie, shall we?"

Arnold Cramer was a short, stubby man of middle age. Though protesting his innocence, he made no secret of his enmity for Phineas Circle.

"I was fed up. I think he cheated me when he sold me that lame gelding. † He said he didn't know about the lameness, but I'm convinced he did. So I came here to confront him. But when I left him, he was alive."

"Did you have many dealings with Mr. Circle?"

"He was always selling me horses. They were all beautifully bred and had faultless conformation, and they all turned out to be bums. Some of those nags weren't fit to walk to the glue factory. But I always thought he was an honest man. This last deal, however, was just too much."

*Markham was referring to Dashiell Hammett's famous review of *The Benson Murder Case* in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, January 15, 1927.

†The gelding in question, Hook and Eye, subsequently recovered and won the 1938 Rivermont Handicap.

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Vance handed Shyster's past-performance chart to Arnold Cramer and asked him what he thought Circle had meant by circling it.

"The so-and-so was even trying to stick me with his murder!" Cramer thundered. "I bred this horse! See? 'Breeder, A. Cramer.' Damn him! Trying to get the best of me one last time!"

"Not really, Mr. Cramer," Vance assured the quivering horseman. "Let's have the whole lot in, Markham, and I'll tell you what Phineas Circle really had in mind when he made that last selection. Extr'ordin'rily simple, y'know."

The six suspects sat in a nervous circle around Phineas Circle's desk. Tree had regained his servant's mask. The lawyer Gilfoyle sat by the side of Fran Circle, and they seemed to be taking no pains to conceal that their relationship was more than friendly. The son Samuel Circle looked furtively from face to face like a beaten dog. Gifford White appeared keenly interested but not concerned. Arnold Cramer fidgeted in his chair, still fuming with anger.

"A quite amusin' case," Vance told the assembly. "It would seem at first blush that Phineas Circle had provided us with the world's most unhèlpful dyin' message. It could be used to point to everyone here. Willowtree Farm owns the horse, and Mr. Circle's butler is named Will O. Tree. Did they call you Will as a lad, Tree?"

"They called me Bill, sir," said Tree evenly.

"No matter. The horse ran at Mountain Meadows, and young Mr. Circle worked on the publicity staff there last summer. The horse's dam was Our Fran, and the wife of the deceased is named Fran. The horse is grey, almost white—"

"—and Mr. White is almost grey," the trainer chuckled.

"Quite so. The noble steed is named Shyster, and while I've no reason to believe Mr. Gilfoyle's professional ethics are anything but the highest, one might apply such a label to a lawyer one was ill-disposed toward. And I gather Mr. Circle had some reason to be ill-disposed toward his lawyer."

"He didn't care!" Fran Circle blurted out. "He'd have given me a divorce. There was no reason for Henry or me to kill him."

"Except the little triflin' matter of money," said Vance sorrowfully, "but never mind. Finally, there is Mr. Cramer, another who'd been on unfriendly terms with Mr. Circle."

"I didn't do it!" reiterated Cramer.

"As it turns out," drawled Vance, "none of those clues to the

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identity of his murderer was what the late Mr. Circle had in mind."

"Then none of us did it?" asked Gilfoyle.

"Actu'lly, that's not what I meant at all. But the question was this: if Circle meant to point out any one of those superficial factors, *why did he circle the whole chart?* If he wanted to incriminate Mr. Gilfoyle, why didn't he merely circle the name Shyster? If he meant to incriminate Mr. White, why didn't he simply circle the symbol meaning grey? Or why didn't he merely underline Willowtree if he meant to incriminate his butler? The fact that he circled the whole chart means that the answer is to be found in the whole chart, the whole personality, the whole history of the horse Shyster. Thus we must look deeper.

"If we look at the past performances closely, we see that Shyster has usually been the favourite in his races. All but one of the times he's been favoured, however, he's been beaten—in one handicap at Mountain Meadows and in four races at Rivermont. Since he came to Rivermont, he's been a major disappointment both to his handlers and to the public: he's dropped from allowance races into claimin' races and down the ladder in claimin' value. He gets the lead in nearly all his races, but he fades and drops back in the stretch. He's a perpetually-beaten favourite.

"Whom would Phineas Circle have regarded in the same way Shyster is regarded by his backers? Whom has Circle watched run in front only to give ground? Whom has Circle groomed only to see him drop back in the stretch? Who has been the major disappointment of Phineas Circle's life?"

A small voice said, "No. Please, no." It was the voice of Samuel Circle.

"Yes. His son," said Vancé. "I can see Sam entering his father's library, perhaps to ask him for money. His father, in a bad mood, begins to vent his bitter disappointment in his son's career. He reminds Sam of his failure to make it through law school. He brings up other failures, his failure to hold any job he'd ever been given even with the advantage of his father's influence. P'raps he reads from Shyster's past-performance record and says, 'Sam, this horse reminds me of you. Always on the front end early, always quits. He's a loser, Sam—a loser like you.' Sam, in a sudden rage he can't control, picks up the letter-opener and sticks it in his father's back."

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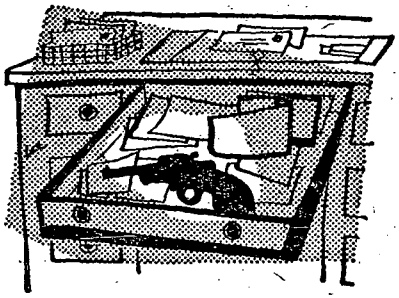
The next day's papers reported two facts of interest to this account: Samuel Circle was arrested for his father's murder, and Shyster won his third race of the year, his first at Rivermont. He was claimed for $3,500 by a large Eastern stable, but in his next start Willowtree Farm claimed him back for $5,000 and he remained their property for the rest of his life.

The same week Shyster died at Willowtree Farm, Samuel Circle was paroled from the New York State Prison. He had spent most of his years in prison working with plants and had become one of the world's leading authorities on horticulture.



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continuing the *NEW* series of police procedurals by

LAWRENCE TREAT

A fur hijacking, a kid bitten by a dog, paperwork up to your ears, a stolen bike, a replica of an old Mississippi River showboat, and a pine coffin—all in the day's work for Inspector Mitch Taylor. And how do you stay ten feet tall to your own kid? . . .

T AS IN THIEF

by LAWRENCE TREAT

On account this hijacking of a truckload of furs happened on the turnpike, the C.I.D., which is the state Criminal Investigation Department, had jurisdiction. On the other hand, the description of one of the hijackers—he had a tenor voice and a dirty yellow beard that hung straight, like a whisk broom—sounded like the same guy who'd pulled a couple of jobs inside the city. So the police department was in on it. And since it was a crime of violence, that meant the Homicide Squad.

While Lieutenant Decker was giving us the facts during the Tuesday morning briefing, Mitch Taylor listened and wondered what was in it for him. Because if he worked on the case and kind of let the Fur Association know he'd had a hand in cracking it, why wouldn't they give him a nice break on a coat for Amy? And it seemed like Bankhart, sitting next to Mitch, had pretty much the same idea. Because Bank had a pair of new dames and was trying to keep both of them on a string.

"If I could get hold of a couple of fur coats cheap," Bank said, "I'd have it made."

"What kind of fur are you after?" Balenky asked.

Bank grinned. "Mink will do," he said offhand.

But out in the hall after the briefing, Mitch found out that this wasn't his day. First off, he

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stepped on a wad of chewing gun and had to scrape it off, and then when he got out in the courtyard and climbed into his regular car, Number Four, the starter ground like a nutcracker, so he had to turn the crate into the garage for the day. Which meant all he was liable to do was wear out some good shoe leather.

Still, you never knew. If he hung around and got in touch with some of his stoolies, maybe one of 'em would come up with something—about this character with the beard. But instead, Mitch got hung up on a dog case.

What happened was, some kid—it turned out he was called Alfie—was teasing a black and white mutt. The mutt got tired of being the patsy and took a bite out of the kid. The kid let out a yell just as Mitch was coming down the street. Mitch saw the mutt shoot off like a rocket, while the kid sat down on the curb and made like he was dying. So what could Mitch do except take over?

It wasn't much of a bite, but the skin was broken and you could see a little blood; so Mitch hauled him off to the nearest doctor, just in case. And the doctor, while he didn't think the dog was rabid and Mitch was pretty sure it wasn't, said stuff like this had to be reported. He wanted Mitch's name and the kid's name and where the dog was and all the rest of it. Seeing as how it would look a little sour if a cop didn't report this and let somebody else do it, Mitch identified himself and said he'd handle things.

It was the first time he'd got mixed up with a dog bite, and when he checked the manual he found he had to make reports in triplicate—for the local precinct, the Board of Health, and his own unit. Then after that he had to make a separate report to the Board of Health with a lot of other information in it, and then another one in triplicate to the dog pound, the SPCA, and the License Bureau, Division 6, which handled dog licensing.

What with all the paperwork, Mitch didn't finish until around four o'clock, which was when you ought to be where they can't get hold of you and hand you a new assignment. Mitch figured the safest place for him was over at the garage where he could superintend getting Car Four ready for tomorrow. In plain language that meant putting some quarters in the soft-drink machine and handing out the drinks to a couple of mechanics. Stuff like that paid off because there were plenty of times when Mitch needed

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some kind of favor here in the garage.

He got back to his apartment at his regular time, a little after five, and he was kind of telling himself that if he could get through a day like this, he was home free. Only when he unlocked his door and stepped inside, the first thing he heard was Joey blubbering and Amy trying to tell the kid it wasn't so bad, his daddy would do something. Then she heard Mitch and she turned around and came down the hallway. And the kiss she gave Mitch, it told him she hadn't had such a good day either, but she was glad she'd married him and glad he was a cop and gladdest of all that he'd got home on time.

"What happened?" he asked.

She answered in a low voice. "Go easy on Joey," she said. "He needs reinforcement."

"Huh?" Mitch said.

Her voice dropped to a whisper. "Help," she said. "Help and reinforcement."

"Yeah," he said, and he let go of her and walked into the living room. And there was Joey sitting in a corner of the couch and holding his head in his hands and you could even smell the tears.

"Something wrong?" Mitch said.

Joey shook his head and it took him a couple of tries before he got the words out. "They took my bike," he said.

If Amy hadn't told him to go easy, maybe Mitch would have got sore. Because they'd told Joey to take care of that bike, to keep it locked up. It was his present for his last birthday and Mitch had put in a lot of work promoting it at the bike shop. He'd tried to get it for nothing, but they just shrugged. Then he reminded them how bikes were getting stolen all the time and maybe it would be a good idea to do a favor for a cop. He had to be cagey about it, but in the end Mitch got it for ten bucks, which was a good deal. And now it was gone.

Mitch sat down and told Joey to come on over. The kid limped a little and settled down on Mitch's lap. "How come?" Mitch said. "Tell me about it."

"I had it on the next block," Joey said, wiping away the tears, "and these kids, there were three of them, they stopped me and asked me for a ride, only they didn't want a ride, they wanted the bike. So I told them no, and then one of them grabbed me and another one knocked me down, and when I got up the bike was gone."

"Know these kids?" Mitch asked.

Joey shook his head. "They

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don't come from around here, but the one that took my bike, his name's Pokey something and he's been picking on me in school. Pokey, because he'll poke you one."

"Any idea where we could find him?"

"Maybe around Irving Street. That's where his gang comes from."

"Did they hurt you?" Mitch asked, thinking of the limp.

"No. Nothing much."

Mitch patted Joey on the shoulder. "Go wash your face, son," he said, "and we'll go looking."

Joey jumped up, and his smile was like he'd hit a home run.

The Irving Street district isn't exactly where you go just to take a walk, and Mitch and Joey stuck out like they were wearing enemy uniforms, and maybe they were. Because the looks they got pretty much told Mitch that the word was out: there's a cop here and he wants something.

Still, he *was* here and he'd better cool it off. So he'd walk around a little and then tell Joey it was time for dinner, and later on Mitch would think of something. Except that he couldn't exactly fool Joey. Mitch had come here to get back a bike and it was up to him to make at least a good try.

The stationery store looked empty, so Mitch went in. "I'm looking for a kid named Pokey," he said. "Know where I can find him?"

The guy stared as if Mitch had only half his face on, then turned away. Mitch spoke again. "I asked you a question," he said.

The guy scowled. "I heard you."

Mitch took Joey by the hand. "Come on," he said. "There's a funny smell in here."

Mitch had in mind going home, only when Joey reached the doorway he let out a yell. "There!" he said. "That's him, and that's my bike!"

The kid Joey yelled at was maybe 13 years old and 20 pounds heavier than Joey, and it looked like Joey's bike all right. But all the kid on the bike did was stick his hand up to his nose and go pedaling off. And anybody who tries to chase a thirteen-year-old on a bike ought to put on roller skates.

Mitch said to Joey, "Him? That's Pokey?"

"That's what they call him," Joey said.

"Okay," Mitch said. "We'll go find him."

There was a newsstand at the corner and the guy behind it answered Mitch's question without kidding around.

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"Pokey Hendricks," he said. "He lives in the housing development on the next block, and if you catch him just smack him one for me, too."

"Sure," Mitch said. "I'll do that."

The big brick building that the city had put up had maybe 30 or 40 mailboxes downstairs, with a buzzer underneath each one. It took Mitch a half minute before he spotted the one he was after. Sam Hendricks, 2-H. So Mitch and Joey walked upstairs and rang the bell.

The guy who came to the door could have made the line of any pro football team in the business, judging by his size, anyhow. He stared down at Mitch and then at Joey like he couldn't decide whether to pick them up separately, or both at the same time.

"Mr. Hendricks?" Mitch said.

Maybe calling him Mister upset him a little, because he let out a roar. "What the hell do you want?" he demanded.

"You got a kid named Pokey?" Mitch said.

"What about him?"

"He took a bike that belongs to my boy here. I want it back."

Hendricks got a big laugh out of that, but before he could speak, this dame in the next room—Mitch couldn't see her but he heard her voice and got a glimpse of the fur coat she was wearing—she said, "Who's there, Sam?"

"Some joker with a kid that lost a bicycle."

That was when Mitch took out his identification, showed it to Hendricks, and said, "I'm Taylor, Homicide."

That made a difference. Because Hendricks called out to whoever was back there. "It's a cop," Hendricks said. "Do I throw the bum downstairs or wipe up the floor with him right here?"

There was no answer. Hendricks lifted his hand as if he was going to shove Mitch clear across the hallway, only Mitch wheeled fast and pulled Joey with him.

"Get the hell out!" Hendricks bellowed, and started down the corridor.

Mitch swung around and kind of reached for his gun without actually taking it out of the holster, and that stopped Hendricks cold. Except he cleared his throat and spat out a gob of saliva. Mitch ducked, and it missed him and hit the wall. For maybe five or six seconds Mitch and Hendricks stood there glaring at each other. Then Mitch lowered his arm and kind of rolled his shoulders. He turned around

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slow and took Joey by the hand.

"Come on," Mitch said. "We'll be going."

Joey looked a little bewildered. Here he thought his old man was ten feet tall and ran the world, and instead some big lunk kicked him out, swore at him, and tried to spit in his face. So Mitch thought Joey ought to learn something.

"We'll get the bike back eventually," Mitch said, "but sometimes you got to learn not to stick your neck out. Suppose I put up an argument, then what? We'd maybe start a riot and a lot of people would get hurt, and we might never get the bike back."

"How are you going to get it?" Joey asked.

"Tact," Mitch said. "You use tact."

Joey nodded. He probably didn't know what the word meant and Mitch wondered what he'd communicated to the kid. Still, chances were he'd get something out of it.

When they got home and Amy asked what had happened, Mitch said, "We ran into a little trouble, but we got out of it." He winked at Joey, and Joey kind of grinned because here he and his old man had a secret between them.

Mitch got up early the next morning and showed up at headquarters ahead of the regular briefing, so he'd have a chance to tell the lieutenant about Hendricks and the fur coat.

"The guy's a pro," Mitch said, "and I bet he had that fur coat out of the place before me and my kid got downstairs, so there was no sense in reporting this last night."

"The voice in the other room," Decker said. "Bro*ther!* How sure are you it was a dame?"

Mitch didn't bat an eye, but he got the point all right. Take a guy with a tenor voice and put him in a fur coat and stick him in the next room, and how would you be sure if he was male or female?

"Maybe," Mitch said, "but the way this big guy was blocking the door I couldn't exactly see past him."

The lieutenant didn't push it. He swung around in his chair and let it squeak a little. "Might be a lead at that," he said. "This Hendricks knows you, so you better keep away from him for a while. I'll send Perk and Balenky down to the Irving area and tell them to get on his tail. You can team up with them later on. Right now, better check up on Hendricks and see if we got anything on him."

In the record room at the end of the corridor Mitch found

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out that Hendricks was a truck driver who'd had two arrests, both for assault. One of the cases had been dismissed—he'd had some kind of a hassle with another driver; the second had come out of a truck sideswiping and Hendricks had wound up with a suspended sentence.

While Mitch was still scratching around in the files, Perkins and Balenky drove down to the Irving Street area and reported that Hendricks was still in his apartment and that, according to the janitor, he usually left a little before noon and worked an afternoon shift. Decker told Mitch he might as well go down there and help out.

That was okay with Mitch. He and Perk and Balenky worked together as smooth as one-two-three, and the job of tailing Hendricks was routine. Hendricks came out of his building a little after eleven, crossed the street, and got into a late-model station wagon. Balenky let him go for about a block and then took off after him. Perk trailed Balenky by maybe a block, and Mitch in Number Four took up the rear at the same distance.

After Balenky had to get closer because of heavy traffic and thought maybe Hendricks had noticed him, he flashed his light and dropped back into number three position, behind Mitch. Perk moved up behind Hendricks, and the three of them were still in that order when Hendricks turned into the parking lot of T & T Transit & Storage owned, according to the sign, by someone named John Fawcett.

Perk went a couple of blocks past the place and then turned down a side street, where Mitch and Ed Balenky joined him for a conference. But the three of them knew their business and they knew each other, so what they conferred about mostly was fur coats and how long Bank could handle two dames at once and whether the food over at the Greek's was getting better or worse. Then Perk told how he'd heard from somebody down in the Second Precinct how some junkie had hauled down the flag in front of a post office, then folded it up, gone off to the nearest pawnshop, and sold it.

They were still laughing over that one when Hendricks rolled out in a big ten-wheel job. This time Mitch led the procession behind him. It's no trick to trail a truck that size, so Mitch stayed well behind and took it easy. By and by Hendricks pulled up alongside a liquor store and got out of the truck. Mitch rolled by without being noticed, then flashed his light and turned into a side street.

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There he had another conference with Balenky and Perk.

"You guys don't need me," Mitch said. "You can stay with Hendricks, so why don't I go back to the warehouse and find out what I can about the guy?"

Balenky grinned and chewed on the end of his cigar. They'd ganged up on him last week and made him promise not to light up in front of any of them until afternoon. This way, Bank had said, they'd all live a little longer on account they'd all get a little more fresh air.

"He maybe has that load of furs cached in the warehouse," Balenky said. "Is that what you're after?"

"Could be," Mitch said. "It's worth a look, anyhow."

"If this Fawcett that owns the warehouse is in on it," Perk said, "you could run into some trouble."

"If he throws me a bean ball," Mitch said, "I'll lay off and get in touch with the lieutenant. He can take it from there."

Mitch waited until Hendricks had finished his delivery and Perk and Balenky had taken up the trail. Then Mitch started back for the warehouse. He was driving along when he spotted this Alfie kid that had got the dog bite yesterday, so Mitch stopped and asked him how he was. Alfie said he was fine and his mother wanted to know Mitch's name so she could thank him for taking Alfie to the doctor.

"Tell her it was Taylor, Homicide," Mitch said, "and that I'm glad you're okay. Only—" Mitch gave the kid a long look. "How come you're not in school?"

Alfie had no answer to that one, so Mitch asked a few more questions and found out they wanted to give the kid some anti-rabies shots and the kid was scared.

"They hurt," Alfie said.

Here was this fusspot of a doctor who wanted the kid to have shots, and they hurt plenty, Mitch went along with that much. Furthermore, the mutt had merely done what any other mutt had done when he got teased too much. Mitch had seen that. The way it stacked up, if you found the mutt and it wasn't rabid, then the kid was safe. So why not get hold of a black and white mutt and say it was the one that took a nip out of Alfie? Only the trouble was, how do you do it without setting Alfie a bad example?

Mitch figured he'd think up something or other, so he asked Alfie if he wanted a ride. The kid brightened up and hopped into the car and they got talking and it turned out that Alfie was a friend of Joey's and

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they went to the same school together. But by the time Mitch got to the warehouse, he hadn't come up with any good idea on how to save Alfie from the shots. And that was when Mitch spotted the mutt.

It was black and white, and while it had some brown in it and was a little bigger than the one that had taken a chew out of the kid, the difference didn't matter. Mitch slammed on the brakes and pointed. "That dog!" he said.

The kid wasn't fast and maybe he wasn't so smart, because he just sat there with his mouth open and watched Mitch hop out and whistle for the mutt. Somebody on the loading platform of the big shed where they stored stuff heaved a pebble at the dog. He was one of those guys that says bow-wow whenever he sees a dog and makes spitting sounds at a cat and probably calls his wife Babe and then puts tacks on her chair and thinks it's a big joke. Anyhow, the dog took it personally and went tearing out of the yard and down the street.

When Mitch got back to the car, Alfie was still there, thinking hard and looking like he was wondering what this was all about.

Mitch let him wonder. Mitch had had a lot of good intentions, only his last one was used up. He'd given the kid a ride in a patrol car and fed him an idea, and if Alfie didn't catch on that all he had to do was find a dog, bring it into a police station, and ask to have it examined for rabies, then Alfie rated every stab of the needle that was ahead of him.

Mitch motioned to him to get out. "Last stop, Alfie. So be a good kid and go on back to school."

Alfie climbed out, and where he went after that, Mitch didn't even want to know. He had his own business to take care of, so he reported where he was, locked up the car, went into the warehouse office, and asked to see the boss.

John Fawcett was a red-headed guy who moved kind of loose. His eyes didn't miss a thing, and Mitch wasn't sure if he was just a sharp customer or maybe was running some kind of a racket. Anyhow, Mitch showed his identification and stated his business.

"We got a tip that this driver of yours, Hendricks, is mixed up with a hijacking outfit. What do you know about him?"

"Hijacking?" Fawcett exclaimed. "Hell, he's only been here a couple of months and all I can tell you is he's got a union card in good standing."

"Any trouble with him?"

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Fawcett thought over his words before answering. "Well, he's got one hell of a temper. He'll blow up over nothing, and some day he's liable to lose his head and kill somebody."

"Yeah," Mitch said. "Now what I want to know is, could he bring in a truckload of stuff without your knowing about it and stash it in the warehouse until he's ready to move it out?"

"Not a whole truckload," Fawcett said. "But a smaller quantity—say, a couple of crates—I guess he could carry it off a truck and stick it in a corner somewheres."

"How would I know it if I found something like that?"

"No numbers," Fawcett said. "Everything that comes in here gets weighed and gets a number stamped on it, in red. The numbers check with the invoice, but anything without a number doesn't belong here. It's that simple."

"Mind if I look around?" Mitch said.

"Just so you don't mess things up. Just so you don't move stuff around. And I don't mind telling you, you're making yourself one hell of a job."

"I guess so," Mitch said. "Well, I'd better get started."

Fawcett let him in from the office, which was alongside. A couple of loading platforms were open at the far end of the roofed shed, but nothing was happening. What Mitch saw were crates and barrels and cartons and machinery, plus a lot of other stuff that was under tarpaulins so you couldn't see just what it was. Mitch figured it would take him a week to get through it all. But what the hell, he told himself. You got to start somewhere.

It was the kind of work he usually tried to stay away from. Here he was alone in a warehouse you could almost put a football field in, and nobody to talk to. He didn't mind particularly when he just had to sit somewhere and watch, but this kind of thing bugged him. Except he was pretty sure he was onto something on the hijacking and that he had the inside track.

He kind of sighed when he spotted the plastic figures they used to use for the Founders' Day parade. The city had given up on the Founders the last few years, and they paraded Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck instead. But they still had a float that was made up to look like an old Mississippi River showboat, with a plastic paddle wheel and bales of cotton and all. Joey ought to see this, he'd go for it in a big way.

Then Mitch spotted some kind of movement on the deck

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of the river boat, and he went over and there was Alfie. He was asleep, curled up on a hunk of fur. He was lying on part of it and the rest of it was hidden underneath a tarpaulin.

Mitch woke him up with a nudge of his foot, and Mitch spoke real tough.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "Who let you in?"

"I want to help," the kid said.

"Don't give me that," Mitch said. "First you tease some mutt until he snaps at you, next you get scared they'll give you a couple of shots, and now you play hookey and sneak in here and fall asleep. What kind of help is that?"

Alfie started sniveling, but Mitch had enough of him. "Come on," Mitch said, and took him by the arm and brought him back to the office. There he told Fawcett that the kid was playing hookey and to hold him while Mitch called a cop to bring the kid back to his mother, with instructions for her to take him over to the health department and see that he got anti-rabies shots.

"Health Department regulation four-o-five B," Mitch said, over the phone. "Bite by an unidentified animal."

With Alfie off his mind, Mitch went back to his steamboat float and fingered the tarpaulin. As he had guessed, there was a fur coat under it. He pulled the coat out and while he couldn't tell its exact size, he was pretty sure it would look okay on Amy.

He put it down regretfully and lifted the tarp—and there was this coffin under it. It was a plain pine box and he stared at it for a few seconds, not sure whether he wanted it to open easy or whether he wanted to find it nailed shut so he'd have to call in for help. But the thing opened easy, and here he was looking down at a guy with a dirty blond beard, straight like a whisk broom.

You see a stiff like this, and the things that go through your head, you don't even know what they are. But at the same time you can't get them out of your mind, so what you do is nothing.

For the sake of form Mitch reached down and felt the corpse to see how long the guy had been dead. The flesh felt cold and Mitch didn't learn anything, so he shut the lid, yanked the tarp back over the coffin, and sat down to think.

He had all the pieces now, and they fitted. The guy in the coffin was the one seen in the hijacking. Hendricks was in on the deal, and this tenor-voiced guy had been in Hendricks'

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apartment when Mitch came for the bike. After Mitch left, there must have been some kind of a scrap and Hendricks killed the guy and brought the body here, temporarily, where there were maybe some coffins being stored. Hendricks probably figured on moving the thing out of here tonight and burying it or dumping it in the river.

Most times, when a case added up nice and neat like that, Mitch would have called in the precinct and the Homicide Squad, and Hendricks would have been collared when he got back here. But Perk and Ed Balenky were on Hendricks' tail and you couldn't ask for a better pair, and between the two of them and Mitch there was a good chance of getting a confession out of Hendricks if they jumped him. So why spoil it by going through channels and letting Hendricks come back and get warned off by police cars?

Mitch waited around thinking about nothing in particular. After a while a truck rolled up to the loading platform and somebody got out, only it wasn't Hendricks, so Mitch relaxed again. About an hour later another truck pulled up, and this time it was him. Mitch moved back behind the plastic paddle wheel and waited.

For a while nothing happened. Mitch wondered where Balenky and Perk were and why they didn't show. Hendricks was talking to somebody at the other end of the warehouse. Then the metal blinds that boxed off the doorways to the loading area got rolled down and the whole warehouse went dark, except for a few dim night-lights. Mitch could hear somebody moving around, and he figured it was Hendricks. But where in hell were Perk and Balenky?

It was too late to do anything about them and Mitch didn't want Hendricks to hear anything, so Mitch stayed put. Maybe another fifteen minutes went by before he saw the beam of a flashlight coming toward him. While Mitch couldn't see too clearly, he got a glimpse of a big guy that had to be Hendricks.

By now Mitch began wondering whether he'd done the right thing. Here he was alone in the dark with a killer who was big enough to pick him up in one hand and throw him halfway across the shed. So Mitch took his gun out, just in case, and slipped his own flashlight out of his pocket and squeezed back a little farther behind the paddle wheel.

Hendricks came straight over to the steamboat float, walked up to the coffin, and pulled off

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the tarp. Then he picked up the fur coat, draped it over the coffin, and lifted the whole business. He handled it like the weight was nothing.

Mitch stood up, switched on his light, and aimed it at Hendricks. "Put that down!" Mitch ordered.

Hendricks' answer was to heave the coffin in Mitch's general direction. The thing hit the paddle wheel just as Mitch jumped clear. It was goodbye paddle wheel and damn near goodbye Mitch, on account Hendricks came tearing at him. Hendricks had grabbed a hunk of wood and was waving it like he was going to smash Mitch straight into the floor. Mitch jumped behind a crate.

"Police!" he said sharply. "I'm police. Hold it!"

That got Hendricks even madder, so Mitch aimed his gun at the roof and squeezed the trigger twice, and that did it. Hendricks stopped cold, and his voice rasped out, all the fight gone out of it. "Don't shoot!" he said.

Then, abruptly, somebody turned on the lights and lit up the whole shed. From over in the corner Fawcett yelled, "I heard shots. What's going on here?"

"Tell you later," Mitch called back. "Get to a phone and call the precinct and tell them I need assistance bringing in a prisoner." Then he lowered his voice and spoke to Hendricks. "All right," Mitch said. "Tell me why you killed him."

"I didn't kill him! He just died."

"Did you shoot him, or sock him too hard?"

"No—let me tell you. I met him in a bar. His name is Roberts. Moon Roberts. He knew where I worked and he propositioned me. He wanted me to bring a load of furs here and store them for a couple of days. The stuff was hot, I didn't want any of it, but he came back to my apartment. He had a package with him and he unwrapped it and showed me a fur coat. This one. He said it was worth a grand and he'd give me a dozen like it. Then you came to the door asking about a bike, and that scared him. All of a sudden he said he had a pain, he stuck his hand against his chest and keeled over. He was a goner, just like that.

"I didn't want any part of him, so last night I brought the body here and put it in one of the coffins we've been storing. I was going to drag it out of here and get rid of it, and that's all."

"Quite a story," Mitch said, "only I want to know why you killed him. And what happened to my partners?"

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"Partners?" Hendricks said. "I don't know what you mean."

That much was straight, anyhow, because when Mitch came back to headquarters with his prisoner the first guys he saw were Perk and Balenky.

"What gives?" Mitch asked.

"Didn't they tell you?" Balenky said. "The state C.I.D., they located the load of furs in a back yard just when the hijackers were trying to move the stuff. Caught two of them cold, but the third guy, somebody named Moon Roberts, they don't know where he is. And once the C.I.D. had the case cracked we were told to lay off Hendricks and come on back here. Where were you all the time?"

"Me?" Mitch said. Which was an answer they couldn't fault him on. And he went on in and reported to Decker.

Next day the medical examiner stated that Roberts had died of a heart attack, no violence, just like Hendricks had said. So about all they had on him was failing to report a death and illegal transportation of a body.

"Going to charge him with it?" Mitch asked the lieutenant.

"That's up to the D.A.," Decker said. "He's got a record, but if the only charge is the body business, chances are it will be dropped."

"I'd like to have a talk with Hendricks," Mitch said.

The talk was short. Mitch pointed out that Hendricks had assaulted an officer and that Mitch could push it. On the other hand, Mitch had a proposition to make.

The proposition was accepted, with the result that when Mitch got home and opened the door that night, Joey came rushing down the hall.

"Dad!" he said, laughing the way a kid does when he's real happy. "I got my bike back! Pokey brought it himself!"

Mitch took the news in stride. "Well, like I told you," he said, "sometimes the best way is to use a little tact."

And that, he told himself, pretty well wound things up, leaving them the way they'd been a couple days ago.

Including no fur coat for Amy. Oh, well, you can't win 'em all, can you?

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a *NEW* Calder-and-Behrens story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens are back—and glory be they are still around! For this time they are involved in an affair in which the fate of the world (no less) is at stake. Literally, the fate of the world. Will there be a nuclear war? Will someone press the panic button that could result in the destruction of millions of human beings? . . . Watch the moves and countermoves—and hold your breath . . .

THE PANIC BUTTON

by MICHAEL GILBERT

Mr. Calder first met Colonel Garnet in 1942 in the Western Desert.

The Colonel, who had commanded an armoured regiment with such dash that it had lost most of its tanks, was doing a stand-in job as G.S.O.2 at Corps. He had acquired the reputation of turning up more often at the dangerous end than was usual with staff officers. Nevertheless, it did surprise Mr. Calder to see him at that particular time and place; seeing that the infantry regiment to which he was attached was about to do one of the things which infantry regiments dislike greatly. It was due, in five minutes' time, to advance over a stretch of open desert which was certainly registered by enemy mortars and was probably full of anti-personnel mines.

Colonel Garnet had engaged Captain Calder in a learned discussion on modern theories of artillery support, while Captain Calder kept an anxious eye on his watch. When the whistle blew and he climbed cautiously out of the line of slit trenches, he was staggered to observe that the Colonel was climbing out with him. It appeared that there were some additional observations on artillery support which the Colonel had not had time to finish, and that he saw no reason these

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contributions to military thought should be lost.

"Just exactly," as Mr. Calder said afterward to his C.O., "as though we were out for an afternoon stroll. And the odd thing is that the mortars didn't open up, and if there were any mines we, at least, didn't step on them. In fact, we had remarkably few casualties. When we reached our objective the Colonel said, 'Well, I must get back, I suppose. Can't stand about all day gossiping.' "

"He's quite mad," said the C.O. "That's why he's collected two D.S.O.'s already."

Later on, Colonel Garnet went to Burma and finished up with a Brigade and a second bar to his D.S.O. His rise after that was steady, if not spectacular, and it was generally felt that he had reached his limit as G.O.C. Southern Command, when he was unexpectedly appointed Vice Chief of the Defence Staff. This was not, normally, a very exacting job, but became so when his Chief, Air Marshal Elvington, had to retire to a nursing home with a heart condition, brought on, it was rumored in Whitehall, by his attempts to cope with a government which thought that free wigs and dentures were more important than fighter aircraft.

On the other hand, the career of Arnold Litman had been a good deal less exciting. A member of the merchant-banking family, with offshoots on both sides of the Atlantic, he had entered politics in the late forties, had won a marginal seat in the 1951 election, and had risen in his Party's counsels by a mixture of financial shrewdness and political tact. Why he should have been made Under-Secretary for War was far from clear. But once installed in office he had delighted his masters by abolishing several ancient and expensive regiments.

His only known indiscretion had been his marriage to Rebecca, a dreamy girl with a weakness for picking up fads and a habit of discussing them with the press. In a private citizen this would not have mattered; in the wife of a public man it could, and did.

Sue Garnet read the article, first to herself and then to her father, over the breakfast table. It was headed "The Lion and the Virgin" and it started: "In a special interview given to *Daily News* man Frank Carvel yesterday, Mrs. Litman, wife of recently appointed Under-Secretary for War, Arnold Litman, gave it as her view that all great wars were likely to break out between late July and early September. She pointed

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out that it was at this period that the two most exciting signs in the zodiac come into conjunction. Leo and Virgo, the Lion and the Virgin. It could hardly be a coincidence, she said, that every major war in history had started at this time. The Under-Secretary refused to comment on this remarkable prediction."

"Bloody fool," said General Garnet.

"Which?"

"Both of them."

"What could he have done except refuse to comment?"

"Not asked the brute into his house."

"I expect his wife did the asking."

"I don't doubt it. She's a stupid bitch."

"Daddy!"

"*He's* not stupid, though. I'm beginning to think he's a crook."

Sue Garnet was hardened to her father's methods of discourse and argument. These, as she had warned Terence Russel when he became her father's military secretary and her fiancé, resembled a machine gun firing on fixed lines interspersed with casual grenade throwing. But even she was taken aback by this last comment.

She said, "You can't really mean that!"

"Can't I," said the General, decapitating his second breakfast egg with the same zeal and expertise that he had once decapitated a Japanese officer with his own Samurai sword. "What about that fight we had last month with the Americans over the ground-to-air ballistic missile? Our prototype was years ahead of theirs and a bloody sight cheaper. So why did we have to give them the contract?"

"Well, why did we?"

"If you want my guess it's because Litman, or his associates, have got a big holding in the American company."

"If you can prove it," said Sue, "you ought to do something about it. If you can't you ought to be jolly careful about saying it. After all, he's your boss."

"My boss," said the General, "is the Queen, and not a jumped-up Jack in office who'll probably be Deputy Postmaster General next time they reshuffle the Cabinet. Dammit, where's Terence? I want to see those papers before the meeting."

"He's *your* secretary. You ought to know where he is."

"He's your fiancé. You ought to keep him up to the mark, the idle young beggar. What are you laughing at?"

"I saw your last confidential

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report. You said that he was a keen and promising young officer."

"Are you aware, Miss," said the General, filling his mouth with toast, "that you can be prosecuted under the Offical Secrets Act for disclosing the contents of a confidential document?"

"And did you know," said Sue unrepentantly, "that you can be cashiered for leaving them lying about? You never lock anything up. Anyone could read them. Our charwoman might be an agent of the Chinese Secret Service."

The idea so tickled the General that he roared with laughter while trying to swallow the last piece of toast. In the middle of this complicated situation the telephone rang.

The General listened, spluttered, listened some more, and then said, "All right. I'll be there." And to Captain Terence Russel, who had hurried in carrying a brief case, "The meeting's postponed."

"I heard," said Russel. He was a large blond young man who wore his service dress with the swagger expected of a cavalry officer. "The emergency meeting's at the Foreign Office. You're to go in quietly by the Charles Street entrance, not the Downing Street one. I've ordered a car."

"What the hell did they think I'd do?" bellowed the General. "Walk in with a banner saying, 'Armageddon Is At Hand.'"

Mr. McAlister, the head cashier at the Westminster Branch of the London & Home Counties Bank, greeted Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens as old friends and explained that the manager, Mr. Fortescue, was engaged, but would be free soon.

"What's happened to the stock market, Mac?" said Mr. Behrens.

"We've all been asking ourselves the same thing. Fifteen points down yesterday and twenty-five over the week-end. We haven't seen anything like it since August 1939. Ah, there's his light. He's disposed of his visitor. Go straight in."

Mr. Calder had sometimes wondered how Mr. Fortescue "disposed" of visitors whose identities he wished to conceal. One never saw them come out. He concluded that there was either a hidden door in the paneling behind his desk, or an oubliette in the floor.

"I've not much time," Mr. Fortescue said. "I have to be at the Foreign Office at eleven. If you have been reading your papers you must have seen what is happening."

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"You could hardly miss it, could you?" said Mr. Calder. "What are we supposed to do about it? Soothe the shattered nerves of Lombard Street?"

"The reactions of the City," said Mr. Fortescue coldly, "are not a cause of alarm. They are a symptom of it. The real reason for their uneasiness is that Interstock has started selling heavily."

"Interstock?"

"I'm not at all surprised that you haven't heard of them, Calder. They take pains to avoid the limelight. They're a group of people, based in Switzerland, who handle much of the floating money of the world. Their funds come mainly from Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, the Argentine, Greece, and South Africa. They are very large sums of money indeed, and Interstock's job is to keep them in an optimum state of investment. This means reasonably high interest rates. But above all, absolute safety."

"And they're selling us short, are they?"

"They're not selling us short. They're selling us *out*."

"Where's the money going?"

"Most of it to Canada."

"What on earth's got into them?"

"That is exactly what we have to find out. The most probable explanation is that someone has deliberately started a scare. There could be financial as well as political reasons for it. There's a lot of money to be made in a falling market, if you happen to know when it's going to *stop* falling."

Mr. Behrens said, "I have, as it happens, a wartime acquaintanceship with Grover Lambert. I understand he's the London representative of Interstock. But it's a fairly casual connection. Even if I could get in to see him, I can't think I'd get much of an answer if I just said, 'Why are you selling us out?' "

"I have often found that a direct question gets a direct answer."

"Only if backed by force. In some countries, no doubt, the authorities would string him up by his thumbs and prod him with a white-hot knitting needle until he volunteered the desired information. But we can't do that here."

"No," said Mr. Fortescue. "No." His listeners thought they detected a note of disappointment in his voice.

Arnold Litman said to his wife, "I don't think you quite realize what you've done. I had to make a personal explanation to the Cabinet this morning. It was accepted. As far as they're concerned this particular episode is over. But people aren't

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going to forget it. In politics it's fatally easy to pick up labels. Look at Winnie and Tonypandy. In a few months' time no one's going to remember precisely what happened. But I shall be permanently labeled as an alarmist."

Rebecca Litman said, "I'm terribly sorry, my darling. But was I really to blame?"

"What do you mean?"

"When I told that young man that I thought war was coming, was it *me* talking? I wonder."

"For God's sake—"

"Do you think someone was using me as a mouthpiece? Speaking through me?"

"And who do you think was speaking through you?"

"It's a wild idea. But it did occur to me it might have been you. After all, if war was coming, you'd know about it, wouldn't you?"

Litman had stopped pretending to smile, and his blue-gray eyes were as cold as the snow-fed lakes of his fatherland. He said, "I suppose you haven't by any chance passed on *that* interesting idea to the papers, too."

"Oh, Arnold. As if I would."

Litman said, "No. I don't think even you would be stupid enough to do a thing like that."

Terence Russel and Sue Garnet were sitting on a bench in St. James's Park, watching the ducks. They, too, were discussing the crisis.

"Daddy's been very funny lately," said Sue. "You know he promised me a month in Florence. The thing was practically fixed and now he's back-pedaling. It's almost as though he doesn't want me out of his sight. In case anything starts."

"Nothing's going to start."

"Well, that's a comfort," said Sue. "If anyone knows, you ought to."

"I'm only a junior Captain."

"Said he modestly. You also happen to be military secretary to someone who is notoriously the least security-minded officer in the three services. Daddy doesn't just leave confidential papers in taxis. He discusses their contents with the taxi driver."

Terence grinned and said, "If you're not going to go to Florence, why don't we get married?"

"Right away?"

"As soon as possible."

"Have we enough money?"

"I've a feeling we shall manage all right."

"Well," said Sue. "It would be rather nice."

Mr. Calder had not found General Garnet as hard to

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approach or as difficult to talk to as he had anticipated. The General had not pretended to remember him, but had greeted him as a former comrade in arms. He had also, clearly, seen his DMI file and was quite willing to talk.

"What we really want to know, sir," said Mr. Calder, remembering Mr. Fortescue's dictum about direct questions, "is whether there really is a chance of someone pressing the panic button, or whether the whole thing's a manufactured scare."

The General paused before answering. Then he said, "When I was a young soldier I was told that an ounce of demonstration was worth a pound of explanation. I was just about to make a visit of a routine nature. If you will come with me I will try to convince you that, although a nuclear war *could* start at any moment, it is extremely unlikely that it *will* do so."

The staff car took them westward toward Holborn, then stopped in a quiet side street. The General unlocked a metal grille which led into a small concrete yard. On the other side of the yard was an insignificant-looking concrete building, the size of a large toolshed. Using a second key, the General unlocked the door of this, and Mr. Calder saw that it housed an elevator. They stepped inside. The General pressed a button, and the elevator started slowly to descend. Mr. Calder looked at him.

"How far does this go down?"

"A hundred and fifty feet. The people who built them had to get through the London clay and into the rock."

"There's more than one, then?"

"There are six in the London area and eight in the home countries. Here we are. Good morning, Sergeant Major. This is Mr. Calder. You have his clearance?"

"Just came through by telephone, sir. Shall I open up?"

"Please."

The Sergeant-Major evidently released some switch under his hand and a steel partition behind him slid up. He then rose to his feet, saluted the General punctiliously, and ushered him and Mr. Calder in, remaining outside.

Mr. Calder's first reaction was one of disappointment. He saw that the General was smiling.

"Well," he said, "what did you expect?"

"I don't really know," said Mr. Calder. "Masses of complicated machinery. Shining steel.

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Winking lights."

"You've been reading too much science fiction. This is a communication center. The machinery it controls is all over the place. The Norfolk coast, Dartmoor, the lochs of Scotland. This place is in contact with them all. Triple cable, buried in concrete. That set of telephones links with the Defence Ministry and the Prime Minister. The other lines are to service headquarters. And to Strike Force."

"And the system is in operation?"

"Naturally. The exchanges at the other end are permanently manned."

"And either of us could give the order for a nuclear attack right now? This moment?"

"I could. You couldn't," said General Garnet with a grin which emphasized rather than softened the fact that he was talking about the possible destruction of millions of human beings. "There's a code word which has to precede the order. It's changed every day. There are precisely ten people at any one time who know what it is."

"Nine too many," said Mr. Calder.

"Perhaps. It's a question of immediacy. Suppose the enemy started a conventional air raid. Enough to block roads and cause confusion. If only two or three men knew the word for launching Counter Strike, none of them might temporarily be in a position to do it. And ten minutes could make all the difference."

Mr. Calder thought it was one of the most disturbing conversations he had ever had. He was not a man who suffered much from nerves, but the smallness of the room, the enormous physical presence of the General, and the 150 feet of earth on top of him were bringing on symptoms of claustrophobia.

He said, "You talk about the enemy, General. Had you anyone in mind?"

"Naturally. I mean the Chinese."

This forthright statement took Mr. Calder aback even further.

"Do you think they would?"

"I put the point to Litman at the meeting this morning. Do you know what he said? He said, 'Their civilization is two thousand years older than ours. Why would they want to destroy the world?' The only answer I could think of was a rude word beginning with 'b'."

The General rocked with sudden laughter at the recollection. Then he said, more seriously, "Of course they'd do it. The moment they were

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convinced it would pay them. They're logical—a damn side more logical than we are in the West. They know that the only thing that counts in world politics is results. Legality and illegality don't come into it. That's a conception confined to a country with laws. It cuts no ice in the international sphere because, in that sphere, there are no laws. If the Chinese could blast the rest of us off the face of the earth and get away with it, they'd do it tomorrow. The rate they're growing they'd repopulate the world quick enough on their own."

"But they can't get away with it?"

"Not as long as Counter Strike is manned here and in the United States. Our detection apparatus is far more sophisticated than that of the Chinese. We could wipe them out, every mother's son of them. If not by direct blast, inevitably by nuclear fallout."

"Do you know," said Mr. Calder, "this seems to me to be about the most dangerous thing I've ever heard of. Ten men know the code word. If one of them was a traitor, or even a fool, he could start a nuclear holocaust."

"He'd have to get down here first."

"If I had the keys I could do it easily enough. I'd simply step out of the lift and shoot the Sergeant-Major."

"That wouldn't get you very far. Did you notice that he didn't get up when I came in?"

"Yes. It seemed rather curious."

"He was making quite sure of our identity. He'd been given instructions from the Ministry of Defence to let the two of us in. If anyone turned up without that instruction—even me—he wouldn't let him past. And he was sitting with his hand on a spring lever. If he let it go, the door into here would have permanently locked. And I mean permanently. It would need a breakdown squad to get it open."

"I see," said Mr. Calder thoughtfully.

"The situation is becoming ludicrous," said Mr. Fortescue. "None of our normal intelligence agencies knows anything. The international situation generally has never been quieter."

Mr. Calder said, "Things seem to be hotting up in China."

"Internally, yes."

"I see our legation has been attacked again. They caught the First Secretary in the street and beat him up."

"I'm very sorry for the First Secretary. But it doesn't alter

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the situation. Someone, for some inexplicable reason, has made up his mind that we are going to be subjected to a nuclear attack. And—possibly by accident, but more likely deliberately—that person allowed the news to leak out. With the result that the pound is under severe pressure, the bottom has fallen out of the stock market, and now our allies are beginning to get worried. The American Ambassador saw the P.M. yesterday."

"And everyone," said Mr. Calder, "is damn certain who's responsible. If it wasn't for the law of libel the papers would print what's being said in every club in London—that Litman started the rumor, helped by that pea-brained wife of his, so that his friends in the City and in Wall Street could make a killing in a bear market. And it's got out of hand."

"You realize that we've no option. We've got to do something about it," said the General.

"I'm not sure what you mean," said Litman.

The two men were alone in the room overlooking the Horse Guards Parade. The Under-Secretary was entrenched behind his desk, looking as though he was glad it was broad enough to afford him some physical protection. The General was standing by the window. He had not sat down since he entered the room.

"You've read Foster's report, I take it," said the General.

"Yes. I don't necessarily agree with it."

"Foster says that the attacks on British lives and property have now reached a point where it goes far beyond casual hooliganism."

"As I said, I've read the report."

"He thinks it's an organized campaign designed to provoke retaliation which could, in turn, be used by the Chinese as an excuse for hostile action."

"I'm afraid I don't agree with him."

"For God's sake," said the General savagely. "What do you know about the Chinese?"

"At first hand, nothing."

"Well, I do! I've fought with them, as nominal allies, in Burma. They're treacherous as hell. Do you realize that they—or some friend of theirs"—as the General said this he put both hands on the desk and his knuckles showed white—"have fixed things so that an actual *date* for their attack is now on everyone's lips. July 17th."

Litman said, "*If* this is a deliberate plot, which I don't

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believe, why on earth would they warn us of when to expect the blow?"

"The oldest trick in war. Get your opponent's eyes fixed on one particular date. Then hit him the day before. A nuclear attack on this country will start on July 16th. I am completely certain of it."

When the General had gone, Arnold Litman's hand went out to the green telephone on his desk, which carried the direct line to Downing Street. He hesitated for a long time before he picked it up.

"Our instructions," said Mr. Fortescue to Mr. Behrens, "have been changed. They are now categorical, and quite clear. We are to find out—*by any means we choose to employ*—from what source Interstock first received information that a nuclear attack was possible." He paused, then repeated, "*By any means.*"

"A few days ago," said Mr. Behrens, "I contrived to run into Grover Lambert. Our acquaintanceship dates from 1940, when we worked together at Blenheim. I suggested that we might have dinner one night at the Dilly. I told him he would meet some of his old friends. Sands-Douglas and Happold particularly. He jumped at the idea."

"Then I suggest," said Mr. Fortescue, "that the reunion take place as soon as possible. Today is July 10th. We haven't a lot of time—only a few days."

The Universities, Legal and Professional Classes Club is never referred to by that full and cumbersome title. Its members long ago rechristened it the Dons-in-London, abbreviated to the D.I.L. or the Dilly Club. It occupies two houses on the north side of Lords Cricket Ground, has an unrivaled library of classical pornography, the best cellar in London, and the worst food.

As old Mr. Happold explained to Grover Lambert over the port in the small private dining room, it was a very useful *pied-a-terre* for impoverished senior members of Oxbridge and the Bar. Having been handsomely endowed by that eccentric millionaire, Professor Goodpastor, it could afford to limit both its charges and its membership.

"It is open to all senior members of Oxbridge, I suppose," said Grover Lambert.

"In theory," said Mr. Behrens, "it's open to anybody. There's only one limitation. *All* the existing members have to approve a new nomination."

"That must make it rather a close circle."

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"It's very cosy," agreed Commander Sands-Douglas. He was large, red-faced, and had a mop of snowy-white hair, in curious contrast to Mr. Happold who looked like a very old snapping turtle. "The hard core are people who worked together in Intelligence during the war. Most of them came from the Universities and the Bar. Incidentally, it makes *you* eligible—if you could stand the food."

"It was fairly plain," agreed Grover Lambert politely, "but more than compensated for by the wine. I think that Corton was the finest I've ever drunk. By the way, didn't I recognize your wine waiter?"

"Applin. Sergeant Applin when you were at Blenheim."

"Circulate the port, Behrens," said Mr. Happold. "It's taken root in front of you."

As Grover Lambert took up the decanter his hand slipped and he put it down, spilling a few drops.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Stupid of me. It must be the heat."

"It is warm," agreed Mr. Behrens, studying his guest's face, which was now red and sweating. "Would you like to sit outside for a moment?"

Sands-Douglas said, "Let me give a hand," and both men helped Grover Lambert carefully to his feet, supporting his weight between them. That weight became heavier as his knees buckled and his eyes turned glassy.

"Put him on the sofa," said Behrens.

"I thought for one terrible moment," said Mr. Happold, "that he was going to upset the port. How long have we got?"

"The stuff would normally knock him out for fifteen minutes. Then he'd start to come round with nothing worse than a hangover."

"Better lock the door," said Sands-Douglas. "Applin wouldn't let anyone in, but we can't be too careful. What next?"

"What I'm going to do—" began Mr. Behrens. "I say, prop his head up, would you, Happold—is to put a regulated dose of scopalamine-dextrin into him. It should wake him up enough to make him talkative, but not enough to remember things afterwards."

"Inject him, you mean."

"Good heavens, no," said Mr. Behrens. "What's he going to think if he wakes up with his arm full of holes? It might get the Club a bad name. No, the modern method is to inhale it." He was breaking a capsule under Grover Lambert's nose as he spoke. "It's quicker and more effective that way."

The unconscious man's eye-

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lids fluttered. Mr. Behrens was perched on the couch beside him and said in a loud voice, "Wake up, Lambert. You are Lambert. Grover Lambert."

"I am Grover Lambert," said the man sleepily.

"You work for Interstock."

"I work for Interstock."

"Your directors have told you to sell your British holdings."

"Sell British holdings."

"Why? Why are you to sell British holdings?"

"War. Because of war."

"Who told you war was coming?"

"Who told me war was coming."

"Who told you?" said Mr. Behrens, very sharply.

The young man behind the counter in the travel agency looked superciliously at Mr. Calder and said, "I'm afraid we aren't allowed to give information about other customers."

Mr. Calder leaned forward across the counter and spoke without heat. "You have a telephone. That is the private number of Scotland Yard. You can ring it, if you wish, and ask for Extension 05. That is Commander Elfe, head of the Special Branch. He will confirm my authority."

"Well—" said the young man uncertainly.

"But if you hold me up for more than three minutes I will have this branch closed for a week while we investigate your reasons for obstructing the police."

"I'm sure I didn't mean to be obstructive."

"Then answer my question."

The young man turned to a filing cabinet behind him. His hand was shaking slightly as he pulled out a folder and opened it. He was not the first man to find Mr. Calder unnerving. He said, "General Garnet booked the ticket through this agency two days ago."

"For his daughter?"

"Yes. Air travel. London to Montreal. Montreal to Ottawa. Rail to Pettawawa. That's quite a small place, outside Ottawa. I believe it used to be an army camp."

"Single?" said Mr. Behrens. "Not return?"

"That's right. We thought it a bit odd."

"It would have been odder still if he had booked her a return ticket," said Mr. Calder, and left the shop without further comment.

Mr. Fortescue looked at the calendar on his desk. It was held by a large white china cat, with a blue ribbon round its neck, and it showed July 16th.

He glanced at his watch,

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picked up one of the telephones on his desk, and dialed a number. The voice at the other end said, "C.M.P. Duty Officer."

"Please get Colonel Jackson."

It took a few minutes to find Colonel Jackson.

Mr. Fortescue said, "Colonel Jackson? Fortescue here. Send an officer and a Sergeant—the officer must be of the rank of Captain or above—to detain Captain Terence Russel. He's military secretary to General Garnet. You'll find him in his room at the Defence Ministry. The charge will be under the Official Secrets Act. I'll have the details in your office by the time you bring him back."

"Good afternoon, Sergeant-Major," said the General. "You look worried. Nothing amiss with your family, I hope?"

"No, sir. Not that I know of."

"I'm glad to hear it. Now, if you wouldn't mind—?"

The Sergeant-Major looked even more worried, but remained seated, his right hand out of sight down by his side. He said, "You know the drill, sir. I'm not allowed to let anyone in, even yourself, sir, until I've had a telephone call from headquarters."

"Quite right. But this is a surprise visit. To keep you on your toes."

"I see, sir."

"Then unless you think I'm an enemy agent in disguise, perhaps you'll be good enough to open the door."

"I can't do it, sir."

"Are you questioning my order?"

"Not without authority."

The General smiled, a ferocious grin which lifted his upper lip and showed a fine pair of incisor teeth. He said, "You have a telephone by your left hand, Sergeant-Major. Perhaps you'd care to ring my assistant, Captain Russel. You have his number. Well, what is it?"

"It's the lift, sir. It's just gone up. I expect this will be your authorization."

The General said thoughtfully, "Ah. Yes. I expect it is. That will save us all a lot of trouble, won't it?"

After that they waited in silence for what seemed to both of them to be an uncomfortably long time before the elevator reappeared and Mr. Calder stepped out of it. He said to the General, "I'm sorry I'm late. My car got held up in the traffic." And to the Sergeant-Major, "There seems to have been some break in the line between the Ministry and this post. They thought the General might have some trouble getting in, so they sent me with written authority."

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The Sergeant-Major read the document carefully, right through, and then said slowly, "I see, sir. Yes. That clears everything up. I'll unlock the door."

"After you, General," said Mr. Calder.

The door closed behind them as silently as it had opened. The General sat down on the edge of the table, with his back to the door, swung one leg a couple of times as though to shake the stiffness out of it, and said, "Now, perhaps, Captain Calder, you will be good enough to tell me the truth. Since no one knew that I was coming here, how could they have sent you after me with a written authority?"

Mr. Calder was standing, his feet apart, his arms hanging down at his sides. It was an attitude of apparent, but deceptive relaxation.

He said, "I took the liberty of following you, General. As soon as we found out you were planning to send your daughter away to Canada. Even before that, some of the things you've been doing and saying have been worrying your superiors."

"My superiors are a lot of weak-kneed old women who'd be scared if you came up behind them and said 'boo'."

"They haven't got a row of medals for gallantry, I agree."

"I'm not talking about gallantry. I'm talking about guts. A few years ago we wouldn't have allowed a crowd of half-educated Chinese Reds to jump us. But then, at that time, the war machine was being run by Churchill. Not by a long-haired Lithuanian gutter-snipe."

"What do you think Churchill would have done?"

"What I'm going to do. Hit them first, and hit them for keeps. And no one is going to stop me. I take it you can see this."

Mr. Calder said sadly, "Yes, General, I can see it. A .455 automatic. In my opinion, the best weapon the British army ever produced."

"You're on top-secret Defence Ministry premises. You got in here by telling lies. I should be entirely justified in shooting you. And I will if I have to. You understand?"

"Perfectly, General."

"Then proceed. You say I've been worrying my superiors. How?"

"It wasn't only you. Your military secretary, Captain Russel, has been under arrest since midday. He has already admitted that some weeks ago he communicated to an acquaintance in the City, a Mr. Grover Lambert of Interstock, the view that this country

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would be at war with Communist China before the end of July."

"Nonsense."

"It's been confirmed by Mr. Lambert. He—er—happened to let it out after a very good dinner at my Club."

"Why would anyone listen to what a Captain said?"

"In the ordinary way, of course, they wouldn't. But Captain Russel was able to quote certain facts and figures in a private memorandum you had written for the Cabinet. Written, but not yet, I think, delivered. You really should have been more careful with such a potentially inflammatory document."

"Continue," said the General. He was smiling in a way which Mr. Calder found disturbing.

"What happened then might even have been funny if it hadn't been so bloody dangerous. In the eighteenth century, I understand, this country went to war because a Captain Jenkins had his ear cut off. We very nearly went to war because Captain Russel wanted to get married. He was innocent enough to think that his communication to Lambert would cause a sharp but temporary fall in the market. His naive scheme was to buy at the low point and then revive the market by telling Lambert that it was all nonsense, when he could sell at a handsome profit. I think he rather fancied himself as a financier. In fact, he was a babe-in-arms playing with high explosive. He had started a chain reaction which he had no way of stopping."

"I can't help noticing," said the General, "that while you have been speaking, you have been edging closer. If you come any nearer I will shoot your right knee off. But do go on with your story."

"What happened then is that the Chinese took fright. They don't understand a free press. When a senior war minister's wife foretold war in July and then the big boys started selling their British holdings, they reckoned they could read the signs. They got frightened, and they got angry. They still didn't really believe we would attack them, but if we did they were going to be ready to hit back."

"I've always been told that you chaps had vivid imaginations," said the General. "You've made up a very good story. It might even convince a weak-kneed pacifist like Litman. But it doesn't convince me. You're completely wrong. This whole business started in China. It was worked out by them, from beginning to end, like a game of chess. Move and

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countermove. I'm not a chess-player. That's why I'm going to kick the board over, before we get to checkmate. Do you think you can stop me?"

Mr. Calder was trying to do three things at once. He was keeping the whole of his apparent attention on the General and he was watching the door which had started to open very slowly and he was also trying to work out certain angles and possibilities.

The General had picked up the telephone. Still keeping Mr. Calder carefully covered, he lifted the receiver and spoke into it.

"Counter Strike Headquarters. General Garnet speaking. Code word *Cromwell*. Action immediate. Full scale. I'll give you the countdown. Ten—nine—eight—"

The door was open now and the Sergeant-Major was inside the room. He knew exactly what to do, because Mr. Calder had written it all down on the paper he had given him and he had now had time to counter-check it by telephone.

"Seven—six—"

Mr. Calder noticed that sensibly the Sergeant-Major had taken his shoes off and was moving in stockinged feet. The overhead lighting would throw no shadow.

"Five—four—

"Three—two—*one*—"

The Sergeant-Major whipped one arm round the General's throat from behind. As his gun went up, Mr. Calder plunged forward in a dive for the General's knees.

Neither of them could have done it alone, but together they managed it. After they had lashed his hands and feet, the General spat in Mr. Calder's face and said genially, "It must be a comfort to you to know that you're too late. Nothing can stop it now."

"Do you think," said Mr. Fortescue, "that he realized the telephone had been disconnected?"

"I don't think so," said Mr. Calder. "But it's always difficult to know what a madman does grasp and what he doesn't."

"When did you realize he was mad?"

"In 1942," said Mr. Calder. "But I didn't realize how far his madness had gone. However, I'm very glad he didn't shoot me at that particular moment."

"Why at that moment?"

"I had an urgent telephone call to make to my stockbroker. You remember what you told us. There's a good deal of money to be made in a falling market if you happen to know when it's going to *stop* falling."

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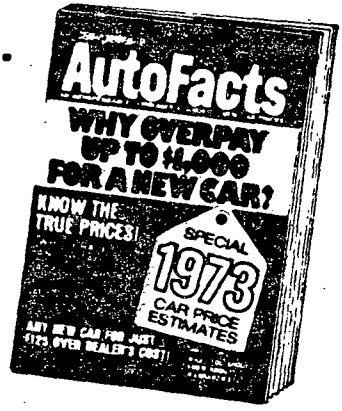

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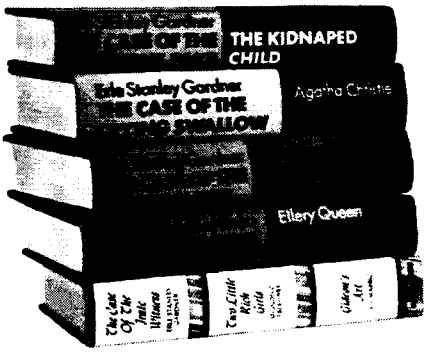

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